

SIKH RELIGION AND HUMAN CIVILIZATION

Edited by
Dr. Jodh Singh



**PUBLICATION BUREAU
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA**

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		(v)
Foreword	<i>Dr. J. S. Puar</i>	(vii)
Introduction	<i>Dr. Joah Singh</i>	(ix)
1. RELIGIO-CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE PUNJAB	<i>Fauja Singh</i>	1
2. SIKHISM : ITS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN CIVILIZATION	<i>Gopal Singh</i>	14
3. THOUGHTS ON FORMS AND SYMBOLS IN SIKHISM	<i>Sher Singh</i>	38
4. THE SACRAMENT OF STEEL	<i>Harbans Singh</i>	58
5. INNER DYNAMICS OF SIKH CULTURE	<i>Attar Singh</i>	81
6. THE SIKH PEOPLE	<i>Puran Singh</i>	93
7. INVOKING INDIA'S HEROIC TRADITIONS	<i>G. S. Talib</i>	103
8. OUTLINES OF SIKHISM AND MODERN DIFFICULTIES	<i>Teja Singh</i>	131
9. SIKHISM AND ITS UNIVERSAL RELEVANCE	<i>Prithipal Singh Kapur</i>	153

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FOREWORD

Three hundred years passed since the great event of creation of the Khalsa took place in the Shivalik foothills at Anandpur Sahib. Indeed, Guru Nanak, while putting up the authority of his altogether new doctrines before the world, stressed upon the man kind to be ever conscious and alert of the lopsided development of the individual by being only spiritual or totally materialistic. Simultaneously he produced before people an ideal man *gurmukh*, whom as he says in *Sidha Gosti* he was ever searching. This *gurmukh* could offer his head for the sake of love for the mankind. *Sangats* were established all around the country and from these *sangats*, where irrespective of caste colour and creed people accepting fatherhood of one God and brotherhood of all humanity assembled to further what the spark of divinity lying dormant in them, emerged *brahmgiannis*. These *brahmgiannis* were again different from ancient spiritualists who cherished the idea that *gian* (*jnana*) and karma are poles apart. Knowledgeable person had nothing to do with *Karma*; he has to remain immersed only in his own beatitude. Guru Arjan Dev while discussing the nature of *brahmgianni* in his *Sukhmani* asserts that *brahmgianni* is he whose heart is always filled to brim with the enthusiasm of public weal. Khalsa created on Baisakhi day of 1699 was the culmination of the configuration of *gurmukhs* and *brahmgiannis*. A very simple, common to all but firm code of conduct was promulgated on this day by the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, which, as says the Sikh tradition was instantly accepted by the mammoth gathering of eighty thousand people. An altogether new social and religious Order of the Khalsa was commenced wherein all the so-called low and high caste men and women had an equal status as well as participation, hitherto unknown to the Indian masses. The beatific nectar prepared through the double edged sword and steel bowl was imparted first to the five beloved ones and then the Guru himself and the whole assembly partook from the hands of the *panj piaras*—who initially, belonged to different parts and the castes of the country. This event in the religious and the social history of India, was a unique one which set its certain and benevolent impact on Indian history and socio-religious systems of thought. In the present times, the Khalsa has spread all over the globe and keeps the standard of Sikh spirit flying high. World over, this event is being commemorated with full gaiety and fervour. We also planned to participate in these celebrations in our own way by publishing standard books on the general theme of creation of the

(viii)

SIKH RELIGION AND HUMAN CIVILIZATION

Khalsa. The book in hand is edited by Dr. Jodh Singh who after much labour has collected articles of some of the Sikh stalwarts, edited them by giving notes wherever necessary and then added his one introduction wherein he has tried to bring out the uniqueness and distinction of Sikh doctrines as postulated in the Guru Granth Sahib, Varan Bhai Gurdas and the Dasam Granth.

We hope that this book will be of much use to the serious readers as well as lay men.

VICE CHANCELLOR

J. S. PUAR

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INTRODUCTION

The range of Indian heritage is so wide, deep and cosmopolitan that at the present juncture of time most of the majority communities at different geographical places by virtue of their sheer numerical strength are busy in proving that they are the sole custodian of Indian culture and civilization. Intermittently one hears the slogans of different 'isms' producing different types of tensions. In fact India is cradle of multinational culture brought here by different races, and, Aryan race is one of them. Prior to the Aryan settlements in India four other races namely Negrito, Proto Austroloids, Dravids and Mongoloids already flourished in India and they had a glorious civilization. Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa civilizations are pre-Aryan civilization is a well debated and accepted fact.

Serious students of Indian philosophy very well know that the two currents of Vedic and non-Vedic thoughts were prevalent in India since the very beginning of the Vedic period. Vedic tradition more popularly came to be known Brahminism which developed a complex system of *varnashrama* dharma and its attendant ritualism, where as the non-Vedic systems were down to earth practically ethical more often subscribing to the theological ideas and sometimes denying the existence of such a God who feels propitiated by animal sacrifices, *yajnas* and other webs of ritualism. In the indigenous non-Brahmanical society the position of woman was quite higher and sometimes raised to the status of the Supreme Element as is shown in the female symbolism of Prakriti and Purusha where Purusha is in fact devoid of almost all the powers. *Agmic* literature is replete with female dominance in all the spheres of life and hence in that society child marriage, polygamy, *satti* etc. are unheard of. No provision of caste heirarchy is there which further leads to all sorts of social discriminations in the society.

Repudiating both these traditions, the ten Gurus—from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh—created altogether new religion, Sikhism, writing about which Bhai Gurdas says in his *Varan* that he (Guru Nanak) established the authority of his doctrine in the world and initiated a new religion devoid of any impurity. To understand Sikhism in its socio-theological and philosophical context the three primary sources apart from many secondary sources are there. These primary sources are the holy Guru Granth Sahib, The *Dasam Granth* and *Varan* Bhai Gurdas.

SOURCES ON SIKHISM

1 GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Guru Granth Sahib consisting of 1430 pages contains therein the hymns of thirty six contributors belonging to pan-Indian social orders of medieval India and was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru who got the bulk of hymns handed down to the successors from Guru Nanak to Guru Ram Das the fourth Guru.

The opening longer hymn of Guru Granth Sahib is *Japu(ji)* in which the main problem of how to become truthful is discussed. Even before *Japu(ji)*, the credal formula of Sikhism known as the *mulmantra* is given which is super imposed upon all the thirty one musical measures (*ragas*) used in the Granth. One could say that the *japu(ji)* is the explanation of the *mulmantra* where as the whole Guru Granth is the explanation of *Japuji*. Besides *Japu(ji)* (page 1 to 8) the other popular hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib are- *Baramah Majh* (133-136), *Sukhmani* (262-296), *Var Asa* (462-475), *Anandji* (917-922), *Oankar* (929-938), *Sidh Gosti* (938-946), *Baramah Tukhari* (1107-1109) and *Salok* Guru Tegh Bahadur (1426-1429). To avoid any type of interpolation or subtraction, the totals and grand totals of the hymns were marked at suitable places by the editor and compiler of the Granth. This work was accomplished in the year 1604 at Amritsar and Guru Gobind Singh including the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur, finally in 1708 declared this Granth as the Guru eternal of the Sikhs. Since the Granth Sahib now is the Guru of the Sikhs, in all the *gurdwaras* installation and recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib is obligatory and mandatory.

2. VARAN BHAI GURDAS

Since the very inception of Sikhism by the Gurus, the work of explanation of the Sikh doctrine started simultaneously and the aphorism and thought frame put forth by Guru Nanak Dev were further explained by the second, third, fourth and fifth Guru. For example words such as *sangat*, (congregation), *hukam* (divine will), *haumai* (ego), *gurmukh* (the Guru oriented), *manmukh* (the mind oriented) etc. were explained according to the Sikh thought frame by the other contributors of the Guru Granth Sahib. Bhai Gurdas remained closely associated with the House of the Guru, right from the third Guru to sixth one and he was the main assistant of Guru Arjan Dev while the first recension of (Guru) Granth Sahib was being compiled in the year 1604. Bhai Gurdas was well versed in the Sanskrit, Persian, Brajbhasa and Punjabi language besides being a serious scholar of Indian philosophy, culture and sociology. Under the able stewardship of Guru Arjan Dev, Bhai Gurdas would daily explain the import of Gurbani to the common man as well as scholars in the precincts of the Harmandir Sahib now known as Golden Temple at Amritsar. The style and content of his explanations of Sikhism in Punjabi is known as *Varan* Bhai Gurdas, the work which was hailed as the

key to the Guru Granth Sahib. *Var* is that poetic form in which the heroic deeds of any protagonist are sung. Here in the *Varan* of Bhai Gurdas the spiritual valour of the Gurmukhs, the saints and classical spiritual personalities is eulogised and the deeds of wicked are denounced. Bhai Gurdas was not only a well read person but he was widely travelled also. His *Kabitts* were for Hindi knowing people and *Varan* he produced in chaste Punjabi for the benefit of his audience. *Varan* are forty in number having 941 stanzas (*pauris*) in all.

3. DASAM GRANTH

The works of Guru Gobind Singh have been recorded in the Dasam Granth which reverberates the versatile scholarship of the tenth master and his deep roots in the Indian culture and medieval literary ethos. Many literary praxis have been made redundant by the Guru while composing the works such as the *Bachitra Natak* and the *Chandi Charitras* etc.

The works in the Dasam Granth have two dimensions: one spiritual and second utilitarian. The content and tenor of *Japu*, *Akal Ustati Khalsa Mahima* and to some extent of *Sastranam mala*, is spiritual; the *Bachitra Natak*, *Zafarnamah* are autobiographical and *Chaubis Avtar* biographical. *Gian Prabodh* is a philosophical fragment and the *Chandi Chritras* and *Chritropkyan* are composed from the utilitarian point of view though some scholars consider the latter as the bedrock of all the controversies about the *Dasam Granth*. The narratives in the *Chritropakhyon* depict the lust and cunningness of women and men pertaining to folklore, mythology, history and contemporary situation.

METAPHYSICS OF SIKHISM

SUPREME REALITY

Being so much imbued with the divine love, the contributors of the Guru Granth Sahib could never imagine that there could be any doubt about His existence and consequent need of the arguments to prove Him. That unknowable, infinite, supreme reality, without being subject to death and destiny, according to Sikhism is pure bliss identical with the self. Though the pluralities such as the *nirguna* and *saguna* are subsumed in the dynamic and reverberating one Supreme Being, the *nirguna* (beyond all *gunas*—qualities) Brahman is the central concern of the soul of Sikhism. However, the Sikhs are not passive *nirgunavadin* ascetics having nothing to do with the tumoils and strife of this corporeal world. Witnessing the people of India flooded by the tyranny of the invaders in the medieval age, Guru Nanak invokes this *nirguna* Brahman as if He is *saguna* to take care of the down trodden Indian masses—*Eti mar pai karlane tain ki daradu na aia* (GGS, 360). Guru Gobind Singh also invokes Him in the form of Almighty sword who is destroyer of ill will and bestower of peace to the saints and tranquility

in the world. However, the Sikh Gurus believe that the supreme power which is perennially omnipotent cannot add any feather in its cap if it is delineated as a corollary of *saguna* Brahman, in the anthropomorphic sense as the killer of demons like Ravana and Kansa (GGS, 350). Hence in Sikhism there is no incarnation of God, no idols, rituals and consequent idolatry. The *saguna* aspect is a reflection of divine immanence of the Supreme, present in His creation, grace and love; according to Sikhism not in idols or man made forms.

The Guru Granth Sahib opens with a very candid and terse theological statement about the Supreme reality and this in the Sikh tradition is known as the *mulmantra*. The *mulmantra* (*Ik oankar satinamu karata purakh* etc) begins with numeral 1 thereby meaning the unicity of God, and the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh operative in Oankar is simultaneously accepted as well as rejected. The three in Indian religious tradition exist as different gods, but in the Sikh conception of the ultimate, their individual powers of creation, preservation and destruction are coalesced into the *Ik* i.e. One. The gods, in Sikh scripture are reduced to human level for the Sikh Gurus consider them to be subject to birth and death.

Words like Ram, Khuda, Allah, Parbrahman have been used with the same delight and ease for the Supreme Reality and this spirit and vision of the Gurus does not mean that they were trying to syncretize different ideologies, but they were bringing into operation the eclectic process leaving aside the muddle of sects and subsects that the people of their time were immersed in. What they sought for was, the One essence, the Supreme Reality (*taṭva*) of the universe, and , the essence remains the same, be it Oankar or Khuda.

CREATION

Many pluralities and polarities are available on this topic in the Guru Granth Sahib. Falsity and truthfulness of the world sometimes have been juxtapositioned in the Granth. According to Sikhism this world may be considered as a dialectic between its being absolute truth and its transitoriness. It is truth, for it is the creation of the ultimate One who is Truth in and beyond all the times; it is false when oblivious of the One intrinsic core or *taṭva*. Its dialectic is accomplished only then when the relation of the created and the creator is recognized and accepted. Creation in the Guru Granth Sahib has been accepted as the systolic and diastolic flow of the One for whom the creation is a pleasing sport. When He wishes, He extends into names and forms and again dissolutes and contracts this whole cosmos in Himself—*apan khelu api kari dekhai. Khel sankochai tau Nanak ekai.* (GGS, 292). To this process of extension and reversion, Guru Gobind Singh calls *udkarakhan* and *akarakhan* respectively.

In his longer hymn 'Sidh Gosti', Guru Nanak gives a prominent

originating position to *ahankara* (*haumai*) in the cosmological process (GGS, 946). Maya, *avidya* and the three qualities of *prakriti* are included in the concept of *Haumai* in Sikhism. This ego or *haumai*, is activated by the divine will in which the world originates, expands, contracts and remains merged. *Shunya* and *Shabda* also are world-originating mines in Sikhism but creation out of *Shunya* does not mean here creation out of non-being. In modern parlance the matter has been accepted as the form of energy which interchanges its forms in different environments. In Sikhism this subtle energy pervading all the matters has been called the Absolute Truth from whom first of all the air i.e. the mixture of gases was created. From air (hydrogen and Oxygen) came water and the all cosmological forces ensued. Says Nanak: *Sache te pavana bhaia pavanai te jalu hoi. Jal te tribhavanu saja ghati ghati joti samoi* (GGS, 19).

JIVA

Jiva, a constituent of spirit and matter, the spirit or soul in it is the support and essence of life on which, in fact, stands the super-structure of body. In the Guru Granth Sahib, the soul is described as a resident in the colony of body (GGS, 180) and the body being a temple of God must not be put to any harm (GGS, 754). Man, a rational being, having the quality of 'knowing' and 'being' is the apex of whole of the creation. He continues to progress to rise and enter into the *sachkhand*—the realm of Truth; and if he falls, he again enters into the cycle of birth and death: *Lakh Chaurasih joni sabai. manas kau prabhi dai vadi. is pauri te jo nar chukai so ai jai dukh painda* (GGS, 1075). To avoid this fall, the *Jiva* is urged in the Sikh scripture to understand its real nature of being identical with the Supreme Reality. Though God and soul apparently look different they in essence are the same. The verses, *Brahma mahi jani jan mahi parbrahma* (GGS, 287), *atam mahi Ram Ram mahi atam*, (GGS, 1153) testify to this proposition. On the other hand *brahmand* permeated with the Supreme Reality and *Pinda*, the individual, are also accepted as identical in the Guru Granth Sahib and hence the *Jiva* and the universe may be called microcosm and macrocosm respectively.

The problems of the *Jiva* are due to his own cultivated egoism (*haumai*) in which *avidya* and maya are subsumed. Afflicted by *haumai* or ego, the chronic ailment (*diraghu rog*), the *Jiva* becomes the victim of evil propensities. All birth and death, giving and taking earning and spending, becoming true and false, becoming dirty and clean are caused by *haumai* (GGS, 466). Only the singleness of ego-deleted mind is a necessary condition for final liberation and that egolessness can only be obtained in the holy congregation according to Sikhism.

SIKH ETHICS

Sikh ethics constitute the inner communion with the *parmatman* and

allowing of His will (*hukam*) to flow unobstructed through the *Jiva*, making *Jiva* a component of a unique aesthetic and beatific disposition which makes him capable of looking after the common interest of humanity. In Sikhism the spiritual life, in fact, is culmination of ethical life which helps in making verticle and horizontal growth of human psyche, capable of becoming a strong cohesive force in social milieu. Sikhism has a different view-point about the five evil propensities, and the Sikh scripture does not urge to suppress, eliminate or discard them. In it, stress has been put on a righteous use of these impulses so that they become a potent instrument on the way of self elevation. Says Guru Nanak : '*Kamu krodh dui karahu basole godahu dharati bhai. Jiu godahu tiu tum sukh pavahu kiratu na metia jai.* i.e. make concupiscence and wrath the hoes and dig thy (body) farm with them. The more you hoe the more peace you will attain. No body can escape the (fruits of) deeds done (GGS, 1171).

Considering relative importance of ethical values the society, where these values have to be operative is in the full focus of the Sikh Gurus. Laying special emphasis on altruism, justice, compassion, love and service, Sikhism accepts that, usurption of the materials of others is not only vice but is rather a sin. A very pertinent statement is put forth in the Guru Granth Sahib regarding denunciation of this attitude of man. Says Guru Nanak : If sticking of blood renders the clothes impure, will not the minds and hearts of those be defiled who suck the blood of human beings (by way of exploitation)—*je ratu lagai kaparai jama hoi palitu. jo ratu pivahi manasa tin kiu nirmalu chitu* (GGS, 140). Truthfulness is the basic Sikh ethical value because it is always juxtapositioned with human life and has been considered as the only fount of all moral and spirituality. In the Guru Granth Sahib at the very outset in the *Japu (ji)* no other problem except how to become truthful has been posed by Guru Nanak and then in the whole Guru Granth Sahib the ways and means of becoming truthful have been delineated. The substance of all the ethical values according to Sikhism is that the truth is really very high goal of life but still higher is truthful living—*sachahu orai sabhu ko upari sachu acharu* (GGS, 62). *Gurmukh* whose extension is *brahmgiyani* and the *Khalsa*, is the truthful person according to Sikhism.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Tolerance and service (*seva*) are the two cardinal pillars of Sikh social system. Impulse of service (*seva*) has not been brought in Sikhism by any external stimuli, it is the part of the total orientation of the faith as revealed and practised by the founder—Guru Nanak Dev. *Seva* having been given especial orientation in Sikh teaching, is a beneficent action unsolicitous of reward, and the Sikhs many times in the history have given response to the demands of the historical situations removing on their heads the silt of the pool of the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Community service is considered an

essential part of Sikh worship. This may consist in doing with one's hands the work connected with cooking or service of food in the *langar* (the refectory or free kitchen) washing utensils and keeping of the shoes of congregation in safe custody. This is an established tradition in Sikh society; high, low must all perform service—humble manual labour, without social distinction. Only through devoted service in this world may one find a resting place at the Divine Portal—*vichi dunia sev kamaiai. Ta daragah baisanu paiai* (GGS, 26).

CASTE CLASSIFICATION

Already prevalent caste hierarchy did not suit the thought frame of Sikhism and Guru Nanak unmindful of the fact that he himself belonged to a so-called higher caste (*khatiri, Kshatriya*) chose to reject the caste system and said : "vain is the pride of caste vain the pride of glory; the Lord alone gives different shades to all—*fakar jati fakar nau. sabhana jia ika chhau*" (GGS, 83). It is not that this notion has been only philosophised in Sikhism and such is case of all the Indian religions; in practical Sikh life this equality has been practised in social life as well as in spiritual context. Sikhism denounces that spirituality which cannot produce respect in the hearts of people for their fellow beings at all levels. Guru Nanak himself preferred to stay at a so-called lowly born carpenter and declined the invitation of a high brow merchant Malik Bhag Chand. To firmly establish this theory of equality, the Sikh Gurus established the institution of *langar* (free kitchen) where all the barriers of castes were abolished because the Guru himself freely served food to all castes and then used to eat with them on the same floor. Guru Nanak would say : "He is the lowest among the lowly; he is their companion and had nothing to do with the so-called rich elders—*nicha andari nich jati nichi hu ati nichu. Nanak tinake sangi sathi vadia sio kia ris*" (GGS, 15). Even to this day the *langar* is an important feature of Sikh *gurdwaras* (temples) where without any discrimination, it is prepared by and served to all. Then the baptismal ceremony of the Baisakhi of 1699 also establishes the equality of mankind where we find all the people of so-called high and low caste operating on the same level.

A happy balanced confluence of the spiritual and temporal vision in one human personality may be considered the foremost feature of Sikhism. Though Sikhism took about two and a half century (from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh) for this successful experiment on down-trodden Indian masses but it reversed the centuries long Indian tradition of keeping Bhakti and Shakti as different compartments alien to each other. In the long spiritual heritage of India one finds great rishis, saints and seers, who have laid enormous impact upon the destiny of this subcontinent but we find them almost always helpless when we expect of them to defend their

hard earned spirituality and the self-respect of their fellow beings. They were always dependent upon a specific caste (Kshatriyas) for this purpose. On the other hand in the matters spiritual, all castes rallied around brahmins known as holy and pious persons. In this process, sometimes the coordinators played mischiefs whose consequences were borne by the innocent persons. This compartmentalization of the duties proved to be less useful and more harmful in view of the consequent fragmentation of the society and slavery suffered by the Indian masses for many centuries. Guru Angad Dev put up his integrating thesis in the light of the teachings of Guru Nanak, by putting forth a new and unique doctrine in the Guru Granth Sahib : "Yogic way is known to be the way of knowledge and the Brahmin Kshatriya and Shudra ways are supposed the ways of Vedic studies, valour and drudgery respectively. But for anybody who really understands the mystery, these all ways subsume in one way, i.e. everybody is expected to follow the way of undertaking all the works himself. Such a detached man is nothing but God Himself" (GGs, 469). This thought was further elucidated and vindicated in the lives and teachings of Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh who on the sound basis of Guru Granth Sahib finally shaped the modern Sikhism.

Secondly, the adherents of Sikhism do not feel satisfied with the mere pilgrimage and discourses; they rather have been religiously enjoined to translate into life the three jewels preached by the holy scripture. The trinity of these jewels i.e. devotion to the Supreme Being (*nam japana*), work with hands (*kirat karani*) and eating by distributing among the needy (*vand chhakana*) are such glaring features which impart to Sikhism the in-built device of vertical as well as horizontal growth of human personality. These three jewels provide Sikhism with the social equality and freedom on the one hand and on the other the spiritual heights and consequent beatitude. Through these three jewels, the Sikh Way of life implicitly urges the Sikhs to uproot the social evils e.g. disintegration oriented caste system and untouchability, etc.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF SIKHISM

Another unique feature of Sikhism is the unique epistemology put forth in the holy Guru Granth Sahib. As says the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 'the origin of the universe, the nature of reality and soul and its relation to the body are such perennial problems which were supposed to have been answered by various saints philosophers and seers after their own approaches and capabilities. In the process the answers were not only many but contradictory, having different teleological dimensions. Epistemology critically endeavours to ascertain why and how

these contradictory views have emerged and whether they show the limits of human mind or an unwarranted application of cognitive processes to matters beyond its ken'. However, epistemology may not be treated as a mere mental exercise for the abstract, which is the domain of pure philosophy and which may only be the one aspect of knowing. Sikh epistemology, having its roots in spiritual experience includes in it not only knowledge but a will and feeling for proper implementation of that knowledge in order to meet the hard realities of life.

Traditional Indian thought based on the Shastras accepts, perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony as the four sources of valid knowledge. Shankaracharya repeatedly asserts that it is the knowledge alone which by destroying ignorance, the root cause of this world, can enable us to be one with the Absolute. About the combining of knowledge with action, Shankara says that 'knowledge and action are opposed like light and darkness'. They are contradictory and are poles apart. In his *Shariraka-Bhashya*, he further holds that the 'opposition of knowledge and action stands firm like a mountain'. Sikhism being non-monastical and life affirming religion has its own postulates and doctrines which though have been generated in this sub-continent but have something altogether new in theory and practice. Sikh epistemology, does not hold the traditional view and does not care for the above mentioned four sources of valid knowledge. Guru Granth Sahib puts forth altogether three new sources of valid knowledge which are very much rooted in the sense of responsibility towards individual as well as social life.

The first valid sources of knowledge in Sikhism is *Vismad*, the Wonder or Awe which according to Otto is the core of religious experience that creates a fascinating phenomenon. To be knowledgeable in Sikhism, one is required to fill his heart with the innocence of a child who is full of wonder and awe, when he happened to be face to face with the expansive world around. We find Guru Nanak in such a state in *Japuji* when in stanza twenty-seven he goes on asking about the great door of the great mansion of Lord, the endless instruments, the notes, the innumerable musical measures, the Indras, the yogis, the men of continence, charity, poise and the indomitable heroes. Like an innocent person he does not stop for the answer and goes on to further ask about the men of learning, mighty seers and almost every thing in the cosmos around. He is full of wonder again in the thirty-fifth stanza also, when he goes in trance by trying to count the innumerable forms of air, water, fire, Krishnas, Shivas, Brahmas, fashioning universes of various forms, hues and aspects. Guru Nanak's inquiries about the suns and moons, the continents and lands, the accomplished yogis, enlightened ones, incarnations of the goddess, demons ascetics, the forms of species and the lineage of the kings are endless.

In the stage of *vismad* alluded to above, the cultivated and inflated ego is erased. The knowledge of the limitations and incapacities of oneself dawns upon the individual and *haumai*, the ego and its subsequent manifestations diminish. The sensible man turns out to be humble and full of cohesiveness to happily accept the existential position and importance of others. Knowledge emerged through *vismad* puts aside the inclination of putting somebody else to harm. According to the Guru Granth Sahib he is the truly knowledgeable (*gnani*) and learned being who is neither afraid of anybody nor makes others afraid of him—*bhai kahu kau det nahi nahi bhai manat ani. kahu Nanak suni re mana giani tahi bakhani*. (GGS, 1427).

Love is the second valid source of the valid knowledge. The importance given to love in the Sikh scripture and other source material is immense and love has been considered as the elan vital of the society. Such a consideration in Indian milieu is possible only in Sikhism because in it alone man has been accepted as man in the full sense of the term. In fact where man has been classified in four categories for the convenience of the higher strata of the society how could love operate there. First rate and second rate citizens were always heard of but the possibility of the third and fourth rate people was accomplished by the Indian society. To talk of love in such a society was not only impossible but ludicrous too. That is why the growth of Indian society, before the advent of Sikhism was lopsided. Love being the best incentive to virtue, the virtuous life based on love was always impossible in India. However most of the Greek philosophers accept love as the early combining force working through different elements which are the cause of this creation of the cosmos. Antagonism distracts them away from each other as had been the case of Indian society in the medieval period. Distraction of elements is commonly known as the dissolution and their being together is known as creation. In Sikhism, this process is termed as *vijog* and *sanjog* to which Guru Gobind Singh names *udkarkhan* and *akarkhan* whose basic root cause is hatred and love respectively. Man being creation of these five elemental creative forces, love is his basic ingredient. That is why much emphasis has been laid upon love and love based *halemi raj* in Sikhism. Indeed, there may be scores of laws to make life happy but the implementation of all the laws in one short spanned life is impossible. Love is the summum bonum of all the laws which subsumes in it all the temporal and spiritual imperatives. Stealing, hatred, anger, lust become alien to the loving person. Greed and love, as is explained in the Guru Granth Sahib cannot exist together because their basic natures are poles apart. Greed amasses whereas love distributes everything gratis, says Farid in the Guru Granth Sahib. '*Farida ja labu ta nehu kia labu ta kura nehu. kicharu jhatu laghaiai chhapari*

tutai mehu' (GGS, 1378)—O Farid love and greed do not go together. With greed love is rendered impure. Such a love is frail as leaking straw roof against rain. *Japu* by Guru Gobind Singh identifies God with love diffused in all the directions. The Sikh epistemology leads man to God through classless society, and hence love for one and all is the basic nature of Sikhism. Unfortunately the man having wrong apprehensions about his being at the apex of creation has started considering himself the master of every thing on this planet. And his sense of mastery has converted into such a thick ego that day in and day out he is busy in snapping his relation of mutual love and respect and regard. The catastrophic results are obvious. Institutions such as family and marriage are crumbling down; environment is disbalanced and man though having all the means of physical pleasures has started feeling alone and aloof. Bereft of love he is becoming alien to himself.

As said earlier, individual in Sikhism bases his living on the *kirat karna*, *nam japana* and *vand chhakna*. *Nam* being central its two wings are *kirat* and *vand chhakna* which based on love for the self as well as others stop the individual to be exploitive and perpetrator of tyranny. In turn, these dictums engage him in *seva*, the selfless service of the humanity. So, being basic to Sikhism, love is the valid and independent source of knowledge of the self as well as everything around.

Shabad being another valid source of knowledge has been virtually accepted as the Guru, the fount of all knowledge in Sikhism. All the Gurus, right from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh bowed before the *shabad* as the Guru vis-a-vis the institution of physical personal gurus prevalent from the time immemorial in India. *Shabad*, the word, is the essence of all creatures and through this inner essence surrounded by the physical body frame, Lord the supreme essence diffused in the cosmos is realized. Says Guru Amar Das that without understanding the realization of the powers and myriad faculties of *shabad*, the world is but darkness. Only *shabad*, reveals the intricacies of the creation and the creator—*jia andari jiu sabadu hai jitu sah melava hoi. Bin sabadai jagi aneru hai sabade pargatu hoi* (GGS, 1250). Much details about the exact location of the concentrated *shabad*, its permutations and combinations in the body are given in the *Sidh Gosti*, a longer hymn by Guru Nanak. Here it suffices to say that the *shabad* is the most valid source of knowledge and it is not merely *apta vachana* of the seers; it is, according to Sikhism operative in and around all the creatures who according to their stations have different levels of revelation of the mystery of the world and the Lord. Epistemologically, therefore, Sikhism has its own altogether new standpoint and the knowledge as well as the sources of knowledge in it, are deeply co-related with the social as well as the spiritual life around.

Creation of *Khalsa*, from amongst the large *sangat* of *gurmukhs* and *brahmianis* gathered at Anandpur Sahib on March 30, 1699, was done with the heritage bequeathed by Guru Nanak to the subsequent Gurus with the vision of creating positive dialogue among the warring groups of different castes and creeds. In fact a serene dialogue is only possible when the store houses of knowledge emanated from considered thoughts is there and it is not inclined to make other party fall flat; it should rather have the urge of saying, listening to and understanding of a view point put forth—*jab lagi dunia rahie Nanak kichhu suniai kichhu kahiai* (GGS, 661). In Gurbani the clear pictures of ugly and handsome persons have been portrayed in *salok varan te vadhik*. Whose mind is all dark, they donot stand true to their words. Their heart lotus is inverse and does not bloom. Therefore their high verbosity notwithstanding, they in fact exhibit their inner ugliness. But those accomplished persons who are of dialogical nature, have the humble competence of saying something as well as of understanding a view point in its proper context. Gurbani hails such persons by naming them the competent ones (*sugharh*)—

Manahu ji andhe ghup kahia biradu na janani.

mani andhai undhai kaval disani khare karup.

iki kahi janani kahia bujhani te nar sugharh sarup.

(GGS, 1411)

Therefore according to Sikhism, dialogue is the whole process of knowing saying and understanding in the right perspective. Sikh life is the life of responsibility towards surrounding and therefore its spirituality and spiritual dialogue have some distinction with other ways of life. Sikh religion gives due importance to man as an individual but it does not allow the interests of the society to be sacrificed for the sake of one man whosoever he may be. It approves humanitarianism but not humanism of the West because humanism can flourish only in the autocracy, apostasy and narrowness of heart and mind. The dialogue with others in view of conquering one and all absolutely does not fit in the thought frame of Sikhism. Sikhism being fully conscious of the egotist personality likely to emerge from debating behaviour pattern of the society accepts that the researcher flourishes where as the debater perishes. Says Gurbani—*khoji upajai badi binasai hau bali bali gur karatara* (GGS, 1255).

Indeed, debate creates suicidal ego called the chronic ailment (*diragh roga*) in Sikhism. In *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh has written about Rama's sons Lava and Kusha whose descendants for generation after generations indulged in schisms with each other and by getting into active battles of egoism got divided into many factions ultimately of which the *Sodhi* and *Bedi* clans emerged. Up to fifteenth century, the *Bedis* were left with only twenty villages though they were said to be *Chakravarti*

(universal) kings of ancient times. To save the self from polemical and disputational egotist mentality, the Sikh religion and Gurbani talk of a meaningful, factual and self-analysing dialogue. *Gurbani* clearly denotes two types of dialogue, the first being the self appraisal or peeping into the self and second the external one. The *Gurbani* inspires first to look into one's own heart and mind to know about one's own meanness, shallowness, the layers of self interests, greeds and diplomacies. So long, the cleansing of the dirt of above named propensities with the broom of knowledge emanated from considered thought is not done, one cannot become pure and unpolluted and one's external dialogue cannot be meaningful. The best example of constructive external dialogue in *Gurbani* is *Sidha Gosti* wherein we find that how without impinging upon the freedom of creed and speech of others, one's own view point could be put forth forcefully.

Besides all above, the views of Sikhism also on Shabad as Guru, status of woman, ecumanism and environment are distinct, scientific and thought provoking.

II

In the series of more than two score of books to be produced by the University to commemorate the ter-centenary of the birth of Khalsa, this book is a humble submission by the editor of this work. We have collected here the valuable articles by different stalwarts ranging from History to Philosophy, religion and literature. The first article 'Religio-Cultural Heritage of the Punjab' by Dr Fauja Singh gives a very comprehensive information about the archaeological findings of the Harappan Civilization which is known to be pre-Aryan civilization. In this article is candidly shown how Aryans had to deal mainly with Dravidians and how the languages and the customs prevalent among the local tribes influenced the life of Vedic tribes. A pretty good notice has been taken as to how some gods of Hindu pantheon gained ascendancy where as others got eclipsed. Upanishadic doctrines have been discussed in a nut-shell and Buddhism-Jainism and their bifurcations have also been touched upon. In fact this article gives full religio-cultural background of India where later on the advent of Sikhism with its altogether new thoughtframe was to take place.

In the paper 'Sikhism : Its Unique Contribution to Human Civilization' Dr Gopal Singh very clearly asserts the distinct and new identity of Sikhism by writing that 'strangely enough, though the Buddha calls his religion' "Aryan Dharma" and was himself an Aryan prince, he derived his main inspiration from the pre-Aryan civilization, now called the Dravidian, and whose main contributions have been monism as against the Aryan polytheism, secular more than ethereal, spiritual more than metaphysical. And those were also the traits that centuries when whatever was left of Buddhism had degenerated into Tantric ritual, and the main

'body was' driven out of India to find its home else where and when Hinduism or more specifically Brahmanism had become a matter of form rather than inner illumination, and could no longer face the challenges of Islam at the spiritual even more than the physical level that there arose "a complete man" called Nanak to challenge the Semitic as much as the Aryan view of life.'

'The Sacrament of Steel' by Prof. Harbans Singh is a piece of work which gives minute details of the sojourn of Guru Gobind Singh at Paonta along with the literary and theological volumes of the literature created by the Guru. Justifying the use of sword Professor Harbans Singh underlines that "It stood for righteous and brave action for the protection of truth and virtue. It was the emblem of manliness and self respect and was to be used only in self-defence as a last resort". The searching mind of the author of this paper brings out the hitherto unknown names of the recipients of Amrit on the first day of baptismal day, and, the text of that portion of *Bhatt Vahi Taluada Pargnah Jind* wherein the installation of Granth Sahib as the Guru has been proclaimed by Guru Gobind Singh in the last hours of his earthly life in the year 1708.

Grudging though indulgent admiration of Sikhism by Shri Aurbindo but non-acceptance of this religion as a distinct culture, and, Toynbee's reasoning which is unmistakably towards attributing to distinctive features of Sikhism only a negative role in its historical career are the facts which, as it seems, inspired Dr Attar Singh to put up his own thesis in his paper 'Inner Dynamics of Sikh Culture' included in this volume. Explaining the basic Sikh idiom of transcendence and its expression in Sikh arts, numinous poetry, architecture, music, painting etc. the author of this cogent and well argued paper very rightly feels that in its distinct form 'Sikhism was conceived as a faith aimed at resolving contradictions born of divisions and schisms in the human society on the one hand and the inner disintegration of man on the other'.

Professor Puran Singh analysing the psyche of the Sikh, showing his idealism not based on land, country or clan and pride, places him very high. In his essay 'The Sikh People' included in this volume, says Puran Singh—"It is therefore, wonderful that in this dark environment of hovering and lingering death, the Sikh has managed to exist and to make an impact on history. He is not intellectually subtle like the Hindu, he is not stuffed with "knowledge" and, let us say, he has not yet understood his own inner culture fully but he is alive'. This essay of the author brings forth the distinct separate identity of the Sikh people in his spontaneous over flow of powerful feelings indeed not bereft of rational logicity.

'Invoking India's Heroic Tradition' by Professor G.S. Talib is an indepth study of the weaknesses as well as the bright sides of Indian milieu

in which the Sikh Gurus had to operate and give altogether new thought frame known as Sikhism. Discussing historical perspectives on Indian heroic tradition, Professor Talib touches upon the legend of Durga described three times in the Dasam Granth. To what the learned author has given the reason for this, one point may be further added that in Durga, the author of the poem saw the epitome of the honourable status of woman which in his contemporary situation had touched the lowest ebb. Being well versed in Indian religious ethos, the Guru could very well see how the matrarchal Indian society was forced to change into patrarchal one and how the woman, who before the advent of Aryans into India had enjoyed the super status in the society was ultimately reduced to the cadre of drum, idiot, Shudra and animal. Through his depiction of Durga, the Guru in accordance with the Sikh view of the equal status of woman, brought forth the valour of ancient woman in the form of Durga to tell the Indian masses that woman does not deserve to be ill treated in the society. That is why he impressed upon the tale of Durga three times and at other places in Dasam Granth also mentioned her. The Guru was not devotee of goddess but he was appreciative of her deeds full of valour which could arouse the spirit of bravery in men and women of India to maintain their respectful identity.

Teja Singh's two articles have been woven into one. The first one 'Outlines of Sikhism' and the second one is 'Modern Difficulties of Sikhism'. While delineating the core ideals of Sikhism, Teja Singh very clearly remarks that it is neither an offshoot of Hinduism, nor it can be identified with semitic religions such as Islam or Christianity. Sikhism is not even syncretism of both the traditions. Sikhism is required to be studied as a new organic growth for a newly evolving humanity and in the process its distinct thought frame will come out. In this religion, the spirit of man is not conceived as a helpless entity in the hands of a Being of an arbitrary will. Here man is a responsible being endowed with a will of his own, with which he could do much to mould his destiny. Discussing modern difficulties of Sikhism Professor Teja Singh elaborates the problems of Panthic organisation and its sects. Concerning translations of the Gurbani into English or other regional languages he puts up a very pertinent question. 'If Sikhism is to go to America or England' says the author, 'which language is to be used by the new converts, English or Punjabi? They will have to recite prayers (Ardas) individually, and approach God in their own tongue. How can their prayers be realistic if they offer it in original Punjabi or Hindi'. Well, these points raised by the learned author demand careful consideration by the Khalsa Panth celebrating the third centenary of the birth of Khalsa.

Despite the clear injunctions in the Sikh code of conduct (*Rahit-maryada*) about the forms and symbols in Sikhism, sporadic discussions on

them up to day are kept alive by one or the other section of Sikh society. In the twenties of this century Dr. Sher Singh who was a post-graduate student at that time also faced the dilemma placed before him by one of his friends residing in America, about the forms and symbols. Dr. Sher Singh wrote to many erstwhile stalwart Sikh scholars such as S. Jogindra Singh, S. Jodh Singh, Professor Teja Singh, Gurmukh Nihal Singh, et.al. to reply the letter of American Sikh bringing out the basic import behind these symbols (*kakars*). In the article 'Thoughts on Forms and Symbols in Sikhism' by Dr. Sher Singh, the whole correspondence on the subject has been reproduced which may be quite useful for the readers.

To recapitulate the spirit of the Sikh doctrines envisaged in the hymns of Guru Nanak and the lives of his successor nine Gurus, the paper 'Sikhism and Its universal Relevance' by Professor Prithipal Singh Kapur has been included in this volume. How the catholicity and liberality which are the bed rock of Sikhism operated in history, and particularly in the time of Sarkar-e-Khalsa of Ranjit Singh, has been delineated and at places commented upon by the learned author who has taken full care to document the various statements bringing out the import of Sikh doctrines.

The reason for inclusion of these articles in this anthology is obvious. The great stalwarts of Sikhs' intellectual world are many but we could collect only these papers in hand, for their everlasting refreshing and thought-provoking value. We hope that this humble tribute will be acceptable to the readers who have the windows of their mind and heart open and who feel that Sikhism is a distinct and altogether new religion among the galaxy of religions of the world.

RELIGIO-CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE PUNJAB

FAUJA SINGH

The subject of this paper is a vast one, and howsoever one may try, it is an uphill task to present it properly within the scope of a paper. I have chosen to concentrate primarily on the religious heritage of the Punjab prior to the rise of Sikhism in the sixteenth century. A word of explanation about the geographical limits of the Punjab used in the present context seems necessary at the outset. The Punjab has been known by different names at different points of time in its long and chequered history. Nor have its geographical boundaries been the same at all times. As it is now understood, it is not the land of five rivers, which is the literal connotation of the term. Broadly speaking, the term has been used at times for the entire region from Delhi to the Khyber Pass, but more often for one or another part thereof, irrespective of its locale or size. At present we are faced with a peculiar situation in which the erstwhile Punjab has been divided into two parts and both of them are known by the same name, 'Punjab'. So far as the context of this paper goes, it is appropriate to understand the term in its broad historical sense and not in the restricted political sense of today. Moreover, it is not possible to deal with Punjab in isolation from the rest of India.

The Punjab is said to be one of the first parts of subcontinent of India to have human habitation. The excavations conducted in the Soan Valley lying in the Upper Sind Sagar Doab, have shown that towards the end of the first inter-Glacial, or about the beginning of the Second Ice Age, the old stone-age man lived in this area. Further light on this aspect has been thrown by the excavations carried out in an old bed of the Beas Valley. Among the important archaeological finds of these places are massive pebble-cutting tools referred to as choppers. The discovery of similar tools at other places further east and south shows that the influence of the Soan culture was extended over a large part of north India. In the course of time, the old stone culture was succeeded by the new stone age or Upper Paleolithic culture when *homo sapiens* as we understand them today appeared. The new period was marked by the emergence of clan communities, taming of animals, appearance of pottery and gradual transition to agriculture. These changes crystallized further during the succeeding Mesolithic and Neo-lithic period. The most advanced Neo-lithic cultures were those found in Baluchistan, Sind and southern Punjab, which in a way anticipated the later urban civilization

of the Indus Valley. Our knowledge of these earlier cultures is however so limited that we cannot say anything definitely about the religious beliefs and practices of the people then.

About the middle of the third millennium B.C. or a few centuries later, appeared the flowering of the marvellous urban civilization of Harappa (now in Punjab-Pakistan). Its appearance however, was not so sudden as it was thought at one time. Nor was its disappearance so abrupt as was once supposed by certain scholars. The presence of prolonged phases of both pre-Harappan and post-Harappan civilization indicate that this civilization had a long span of life with its gradual genesis and decline. In fact, it continued to exist even after the urban centres in Sind, Baluchistan and Afganistan had ceased to exist. Nor would it be correct to limit its influence to a narrow strip of territory in south Punjab as was the contention of archaeologists and historians some decades ago. Fresh researches have revealed that the Harappan civilization embraced an enormous territory which stretched for more than 1100 kms from north to south and more than 1600 kms from west to east. The existence of large cities and the carefully defined system of town planning and architecture point to the high level of development attained by this civilization.

Archaeological findings give us some idea of the religious views entertained by the people of the Harappan civilization. There is, for example, sufficient evidence to believe that the first temples in the Punjab were built during this period. Links have also been found between these temples and ritual bathing pools. Also certain stone figures have been discovered which seem to represent the figures of men dedicated to a male deity comparable to proto-Śiva. Sir John Marshall who bore the main responsibility of excavations has identified the deity with *Śiva-Paśūpati*, i.e. Śiva the Patron and Protector of cattle, on the ground of wild animals standing near him on both of his sides. A. Ghosh has questioned this assumption but his view has not been accepted by most scholars of the subject. The seals which are a special feature of this civilization show that the Harappans also practised the rites of fire and water as well as tree-worship. Many of those seals reveal concepts having direct parallels with the religious ideas of Hinduism of the later-period. A large number of terra-cotta figurines discovered in the excavations point to the cult of a Mother Goddess. However, all these inferences are still to a large extent mere hypotheses and will remain so until we are in a position to decipher the Indus script. Yet, even now it would be hardly possible to deny that the traditions of the Harappan civilization exerted a definite influence on the development of Vedic tribes.

The Harappan civilization declined during the first half of the second millennium B.C. and then a new people, the Aryans, entered the Punjab and established their domination. There is a tendency on the part of some scholars to view their entry into the country (around 1500 B.C.) as the subjugation of

backward aborigines by a people who brought civilization to India and set up an advanced society there. But it is an outdated view and no sound scholar, whether Indian or foreigner, is prepared to admit that the advent of Aryans was preceded by a dark period of barbarism. Rather, in many respects the new-comers were worse off than their highly urbanized Harappan predecessors. But in one respect the Aryans had a clear edge over them and that was their familiarity with the use of iron to which the earlier people were total strangers.

The Aryans entered the Punjab in several waves, the first of which is supposed to have made its appearance sometime during the first half of the second millennium B.C. Their first great book, the *Rg-veda*, according to most modern experts, dating from the 11th or 10th century B.C., was produced in the Punjab, particularly those parts of it which are not far off from the land between Ambala and Thanesar. This shows that the Aryans stayed in the Punjab for several hundred years before they moved into the Jamuna-Ganga Doab and further ahead. This is also the period when there grew up in the Punjab the famous Painted Grey Ware culture. This culture is regarded as the product of interaction of the new Aryan culture with the old local cultures which were perhaps relics of the later Harappan culture. It would appear from linguistic and archaeological evidence that in the Punjab the Aryans had to deal mainly with Dravidian tribes. The languages and the customs prevalent among these local tribes influenced the life the Vedic tribes. Linguistic analysis of the *Rg-veda* and other *Samhitas* has revealed that the Dravidian languages exerted a marked influence on the Aryans, although their interaction was of short duration. Gradually a new culture emerged, which embraced the achievements of both the Aryans and local tribes and was soon common to a large part of the population of northern India. This culture cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as an Indo-Aryan one introduced from outside and only with some mental reservation may be termed the culture of the Vedic tribes of the *Rg-veda* age, because, it was already a specifically Indian culture of the first millennium B.C.

Archeological evidence shows that the painted Grey Ware culture gave way to the Northern Black-Polished Ware culture around the second half of the first millennium B.C. (between the 6th and 2nd centuries B.C.). This latter culture was in many ways indebted to the traditions of the preceding period; yet it was now no longer a culture merely of Vedic Indo-Aryans but a culture of the Indian tribes of northern India. The range of this culture spread from the Punjab to the lower reaches of the Ganga because by this time the Aryans had practically penetrated the main regions of the Ganga Valley.

Vedic texts enable us to acquaint ourselves with the religious views of the ancient Indians of the Vedic age. Vedism is the most ancient system of religious beliefs in India and it was to exert a major influence on late religious trends and philosophical teaching in the country. But it has to be admitted

that the different elements of this system took shape and crystallized over a long period. An essential element of the Vedic religion was polytheism—worship of a large number of gods and goddesses. It was to these divinities that they addressed their hymns and offered all their sacrifices. People's attitude then was primarily concerned with the here and not the hereafter, this life and not the life beyond. In their hymns they asked the gods to send them more cattle, to give them victory in battle, good harvests, or to free them from disaster or ruin. Broadly, their divinities belonged to three categories; (i) heavenly gods, (ii) terrestrial gods, (iii) gods of *antarikṣa* (space between heaven and earth). The first category included the Sun-god (*surya*), Usha (goddess of the dawn) and Varuna, the upholder of moral order or *rta*. In the second category those held in the highest esteem were Agni (god of storms), Vāyu (god of wind) and Indra (god of thunder and rain). Among all these gods Indra was perhaps the most important, as 250 hymns of the *Rg-veda* (almost a quarter of the total number) are devoted to him. Varuna's significance was also very great. He was believed to be ruling over the entire universe round which he travelled on a chariot. He determined the movements of the heavenly bodies and the actions of men. He was unsparing in his dealings with the sinful but was merciful to the innocent and repentant. He even laid the moral standards for the gods. Such ethical aspects associated with the god Varuna were elaborated later and incorporated in subsequent religious and philosophical system of ancient India. Unlike Indra, Varuna was assigned only a secondary importance in *Rg-veda*. Some scholars explain this by saying that he was taken over by the Aryans from the local tribes. But with the passage of time his position vastly improved and he became one of the most popular of all gods. Like Rudra, Viṣṇu of the *Rg-veda* was also a minor god who subsequently became one of the principal gods. Among the terrestrial gods both Agni and Soma were regarded very highly. Agni was of fundamental importance with regard to religious rites, which had to be performed if proper links between men and gods were to be established. Soma has 120 hymns dedicated to him in the *Rg-veda*. Both gods and men sought to partake of this drink because they thought that through its medium they could achieve immortality.

It may be noted that during the earlier phase of Vedism there was no clear-cut individualization of the gods, or clear-cut distribution of their functions. There was also no firmly stipulated hierarchy for the gods. The general tendency, rather, was what Max Müller has described as henotheism. This being the practice of ascribing all attributes to any particular god at a particular moment, reflected a certain trend towards a highly specific variety of monotheism that later found its most detailed expression in the doctrine of the *upaniṣads*.

Apart from benevolent gods, the people of Vedic age believed in the existence of evil spirits and demons—*rākṣasas* and *asuras*.

As Vedism developed, changes came about in the significance of the various gods and their place in the general pattern of Vedic mythology and rites. The ancient gods gradually lost their importance and some new gods like Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva emerged as the three principal deities constituting what came to be called *trimurti* (trinity). Still another major change was the emergence of a system of ritualism. This led to the rise of a professional class of priests called brahmins. The priesthood being interested in the maintenance of their supremacy in the society, consolidated their position by propagating the belief that it was only through the performance of prescribed rituals with the help of Brahmins that people could achieve meaningful identity with the gods.

The *Rg-veda* was the first of the Indo-Aryans' four Vedas. The other three Vedas were (a) the *Sāma-veda* (a collection of chants), (b) the *Yajur-veda* (a collection of prayers and formulas for sacrifices), and (c) the *Atharva-veda* (a collection of incantations and formulas of magic). All these later Vedas were compiled after the Aryans had already penetrated the Jamuna-Ganga Doab and the territories beyond. After the Vedas but in the context of the same traditions, came many other works such as the Brāhmaṇas (interpretations of the Vedic rituals), Āraṇyakas (priest books), Upaniṣads (religious-cum-philosophical treatises), and the epics of *Rāmāyāṇa* and *Mahābhārata*.

The Upaniṣads marked the culmination of the Vedic religious tradition. It is commonly agreed that they were 108 in number of which 13 are regarded as the most ancient texts. Their period of composition is believed to be from the seventh to the fourth century B.C. Proceeding from a basically traditional approach, the authors of these texts were able to resolve problems extending far beyond the scope of Vedic themes. In essence they represent the first attempt to explain the world within the framework of a single world-view. The idealist view of the Upaniṣads revolved round the theme viz. *Ātmā is Brahman* and *Brahman is Ātmā*, i.e. it is all *Brahman* and the individual soul is only an illusion. The world is essentially in a state of uninterrupted change; not only the material world but also the spiritual world is subject to this process of constant change is explained in terms of a universal law of *karma* and the law of *karma* operates in such a way that the entire phenomenon of birth and death in the universe inclusive of all forms of creation is determined by it. The law of *karma* governs the transformation of life from one form into another in a cyclic manner. Thus the Upaniṣads reveal marked differences with the Vedic teaching. Many traditional tenets were interpreted in them in a new light and new explanations were offered. The Vedic man revered his traditional gods for his good fortune. The Upaniṣads presented a very different teaching. There were no personal gods for men, just as there was no personal man, limited in terms of space and time. Rather, man was considered part of the unending cycle of existence. It was said that the flow of life is eternal and

all living things in the universe are subject to it. Not all Upaniṣads, however, were idealist. One of the thinkers named Uddalaka, at least, gave expression to realistic views very close to a verity of materialism. He endowed Nature with the main creative force and thought that all that exists in the world (both physical and mental, including consciousness) is the product of material elements.

The *karma* doctrine of Upaniṣads contributed one of the basic principles of Indian religions. It also possessed specific social implications insofar, as it provided an answer to the crucial question as to the reason behind human suffering and adversity. Some of the principles laid in the Upaniṣads were later used in the Buddhist and Jaina teachings. Many of their ideas had major influence on the philosophers and writers of the Middle Ages and cultural developments in modern and contemporary history, not only within India but also far beyond her borders.

The epics of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* which came just a few centuries after the Upaniṣads have their own importance for their valuable information on the various aspects of social and cultural life. Even today they are great forces affecting the cultural and social life of our country.

3

About the middle of the first millennium B.C., some movements of protest arose against the brahmanical Vedism. One of these movements was the appearance of Upaniṣads which we have already seen. However, this movements did not reject Vedism but strove to inject it with a new life on a new theoretically sounder basis. The real challenge to Vedism came from unorthodox movements of Jainism and Buddhism, and also those schools of thought which gave expression to the materialist trend in India philosophy. The main cause of this revolt against Vedism was the general dissatisfaction with the primitive character of its mythological concepts, its intricate and archaic ritual, and the material claims of its priests whom many had ceased to regard as the bearers of superior wisdom. About this time there was an intensive spiritual searching. The way in this direction was led by a large number of ascetics called *Śramaṇas*. These *Śramaṇas* soon gathered numerous disciples around them and then refused to accept the authority of the Vedas and the ideological and social norms based on the latter. They outrightly rejected the claims of the brahmins and instead upheld those of the other *varṇas* (castes). Moreover, unlike the brahmins who attached more importance to rituals than to ethics, the new religious systems laid maximum stress on ethical norms of behaviour. Like the Upaniṣads all unorthodox systems such as Jainism, Buddhism and Ājīvikism believed in the laws of *karma* and reincarnation but disagreed with them on other vital questions. Between themselves they had many points of difference. Ājīvikas though severely critical of the brahmins and the *varṇāśrama* by which they swore, had no positive philosophy of their own. On the other hand, both the Buddhism was

known for its moderation whereas Jainism advocated a path of extremism. Out of these three new creeds Buddhism achieved the maximum success though ultimately it suffered a worse fate in the land of its birth than Jainism.

Around the first or second century A.D., India witnessed the rise of a vast Kuṣāṇ empire which reached its height under Kanīṣka. At its height it became one of the strongest powers of the ancient world, on par with China, Rome and Parthia. Besides including Afghanistan and some parts of Central Asia, it covered the greater part of north India extending as far as Bihar in the east and the river Narbada in the south. The Kuṣāṇs left a deep mark on the historical and cultural development of many regions of the ancient world. Diverse peoples had been brought together within the confines of a single administration. Common ties had developed not only between the different parts of the Kuṣāṇ empire but also with Rome, South-East Asia, China and Japan. Consequently the Kuṣāṇ culture emerged on the basis of a synthesis of traditions, though some of the local schools and trends continued to preserve their identity. The finest of classical traditions were also adopted as part of a common heritage. A prominent role in the Kuṣāṇa art was played by the Bactrian school that was to exert its influence on the Kuṣāṇ art as a whole. In the religious sphere toleration of diversity of beliefs was the hall-mark of the Kuṣāṇ rule. It is a matter of great significance that the Kuṣāṇ coins bear images of Iranian, Greek and Indian gods. This was in spite of the fact that Kanīṣka had a major interest in Buddhism. Even after the fall of the empire many of such common traditions and links between different parts of this empire endured. Thus the legacy of the Kuṣāṇa period has left indelible mark on the subsequent development of many peoples of the East.

As in the Mauryan age, so at the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Magadha became the centre of a great political power. A new vast empire sprang up under the leadership of Gupta emperors, which reached the highest watermark of its glory in the reign of Samudra Gupta. Under him the empire became one of the largest in the East. Its influence spread far and wide and close ties were established with many other states. Samudra Gupta's successor Chandra Gupta II, popularly called Bikramajit or Vikramāditya, consolidated the Gupta rule still further and paved the way for even greater attainments in the growth of Indian Culture. These attainments pertained to several areas, such as architecture, painting, music, science, technology, literature, etc. However, it has to be remembered that the process which reached its points of maturity during the Gupta period had started much earlier. This was equally true of the developments in the religious field. The unorthodox creeds of Buddhism, Jainism and Ājīvikism had all begun to lose much of the ground they had occupied earlier. First signs of a split of Buddhism into Hīnayānism and Mahāyānism had appeared as early as the Mauryan period. Once begun, the division grew wider and wider over the centuries, until in the time of the Guptas their common links came to be confined to the beliefs in the attainment

of *nirvāṇa*, the law of *karma* and teaching of the *aṣṭamārga*. Māhāyanism which had emerged as the greater vehicle over the centuries, had in course of time developed a number of new doctrines. Buddha was no longer viewed as a historical figure and was identified with the supreme power of the universe. The Māhāyanism believed in a multiplicity of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas and underscored their worship. These beliefs were quite alien to the original form of Buddhism, i.e. Hīnayānism. The Hīnayānist's approach to *nirvāṇa* was mainly individualistic. On the other hand, the Mahāyānists laid great stress on compassion and service of mankind and regarded them as the best means to attain the goal of *nirvāṇa*. In the matter of the language of religious writing as well, the new sect did not hesitate to make use of Sanskrit which was an anathema for the Hīnayānists. Still another line of departure was that whereas the Mahāyānists would not mind keeping the images of some Hindu gods along with that of the Great Buddha, the Hīnayānists were totally opposed to it.

Naturally, the strengthening of Mahāyānist trends reduced the gulf dividing Buddhism from brahmanical Vedism. The process was accelerated by the way the brahmanical priesthood reacted to it. They, true to their long standing tradition of absorbing divergent elements into their own religious system, chose to include Lord Buddha into their own pantheon in the name of a reincarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. This conciliatory attitude was further aided by the trenchant criticism of Buddhist tenets by men like Śaṅkarācārya.

The Mahāyāna Buddhism had further fissures. The best known of these new schools of thought were Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. The fundamental tenet of the Mādhyamika teaching was the doctrine of *śūnyatā* (literally, the void), and for this reason this school is sometimes called Śūnyavāda. The greatest exponent of this school was Nāgārjuna who believed that everything that exists, whether material or spiritual, is unreal. He declared Lord Buddha's *dharma* to be nothing but *śūnya**. Nāgārjuna's idea exerted a considerable influence on development of the religious and philosophical thought in ancient and early middle ages of our history. The founders of the Yogācāra school were Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. This school accepted only man's consciousness or mind as real and viewed the whole material world as an illusion.

By the beginning of the middle Ages Hīnayāna Buddhism had practically disappeared in India after becoming the main religion of Śrī Lanka and later South-East Asia. The Mahāyāna Buddhism survived longer but this too nearly disappeared between the 8th and 9th centuries and all its followers were gradually absorbed into Hinduism.

The rise of the Gupta Empire coincided with the rise of a new form of Brahmanism called Hinduism. The amazing ease with which the Hindu tradition absorbed various local religions, coupled with its philosophy which

*However, it may be noted that modern Buddhist scholars have proved that Nagarjuna used *śūnya* in the sense of intrinsic nature of all the matters.—Editor

simultaneously admitted the existence of numerous interpretations in the form of schools of thought often independent of one another, the preservation and development of traditional social institutions such as the *varṇāśrama* system, all served to make Hinduism an unusual religious synthesis, and for this reason was more acceptable to the people than any other Indian religion. The Gupta patronage of Brāhmaṇa lent great strength to the processes of religious change now at work. In the result, what emerged now was not a mere revival of the old brahmanical creed but something new which was a blending of several old and new elements. The old Vedic divinities by now had lost their popularity. Most of the rituals laid down in the Vedas also by this time had become out of date. On the other hand, religious and philosophical concepts of the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā* were still held in great esteem and it was they, really, which paved the way for the new religious synthesis called Hinduism.

But Hinduism as it emerged did not represent a single school of thought. Three main schools, particularly, are worthy of note : Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śāktism. The first school became wide-spread under the Guptas. Viṣṇu, who was in the beginning just one of the Vedic deities, gradually rose in importance. He was first identified with Nārāyaṇa a deity worshipped by the native tribes of northern India. Later Nārāyaṇa became just another name for Viṣṇu. In course of time he rose to the supreme position and his worship became the basis of Vaiṣṇavism. The great popularity of this religion may be explained in terms of the theory of *avatārvād*, which says that Lord Viṣṇu appears from time to time in various garbs. This greatly facilitated the absorption of local beliefs and ceremonies of worship. In course of time all local deities such as Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma came to be admitted as just different incarnations of the same Lord Viṣṇu.

The growth of Śaivism and Śāktism was a simultaneous process. The *Rg-veda* referred to Rudra as one of the *Āryan* deities. He was then considered a god of thunderstorms and hurricanes, surrounded by a host of cruel spirits hostile to man. The equation of Rudra and Śiva took place much later. Śiva is believed to have been taken from the pre-Aryan Harappan civilization. Gradually the name Śiva became more important and he was assigned a position almost equal to that of Lord Viṣṇu. The synthetic process was carried much further. Gaṇeṣa and Skanda, who were important local deities worshipped in certain other parts of the country, were brought together as members of a single family. Worship of certain goddesses was prevalent in some places. By the same process of synthesis, the male of gods Viṣṇu and Śiva were declared to be husbands of those female deities, as for instance Viṣṇu as the husband of Lakṣmī and Śiva as the husband of Umā or Pārvatī.

The new religious developments led to the concept of Hindu *trimurti* (Trinity) consisting of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. This concept is explained sometimes on the basis of division of functions. For example, Brahmā is

regarded as the god of creation, Viṣṇu as the god of protection and maintenance and Śiva as that of destruction. This interpretation is again an exercise in synthesizing the different modes of worship. However, the followers of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism hold different views and each of these sects regards its favourite god as the supreme power having all divine attributes. Similarly in *Śāktism*, the worship of a goddess was not on the basis that she happened to be the spouse of one supreme male god or another but independently of the male gods and in her own right, representing the supreme power herself.

Changes were not confined to matters of religious belief and practice alone. Similar stirring were noticeable in the realm of metaphysical thought, over a period of several hundred years extending on both sides of the Christian era. Even as early as the appearance of the first Upaniṣads, signs of conflict between two main philosophical trends, materialism and idealism, were visible. The chief exponents of the trend of materialism were Lokāyats and Cārvākas. The other trend was reflected, in greater or lesser degree, in several other schools of thought. They are known as the six Darśanas which are called Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Uttara Mīmāṃsā. They all acknowledge the authority of the Vedas, the law of *karma*, and belief in mokṣa (ultimate liberation). At the same time these schools differ considerably. On some points they are even opposed to each other. We need not go into any lengthy discussion of these systems of thought here. But one thing may be stressed that out of these the system which made the maximum impact on later philosophical thought was the Uttara Mīmāṃsā, commonly known as Vedānta. But to this we will turn later.

In a situation like this where there existed side by side such widely differing religious and religio-philosophical trends as the Brahmanism of the Upaniṣads, Buddhism, Jainism, Ajīvikism and when the philosophies of the different schools such as Sāṅkhya and Yoga were emerging, the need for a thoughtful survey and coordination of divergent elements could not be overlooked. The result was the production of the *Bhagavadgītā*. It forms part of Book VI of the Mahābhārata and is introduced as a dialogue between Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, a Paṇḍava hero, bearing on such themes as man's destination, essence of morality and relationship between the earthly and the divine. There are signs of interaction with different trends of thought prevailing in the country at the time and some of the new idea have even been incorporated in it. But on the whole, it is single, unified well-coordinated system of philosophy that we find in the *Gītā*. The purpose of the composition seems to be an attempt to reform the Brahmanical ideas within the framework of the orthodox Vedic tradition so as to consolidate that tradition at a time of major social and spiritual changes. In other words, the *Gītā* represents the priesthood's endeavour to adapt traditional Brahmanical dogmas to the needs of the new age, taking into account at the same time the achievements of

other schools of religious and philosophical thought.

The philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā* is important not merely because of the historical situation in which it was expounded. It has ever since remained a unique source of inspiration for all future generations of India. Further, it has been translated into a large number of world languages for the benefit of wider sections of humanity.

A few words regarding the Purāṇas may not be out of place here. Like the Upaniṣads or the six Darśanas, the Purāṇas too were not composed at one and the same time. Their composition was also spread over several centuries. But they assumed their final shape about the period of the Guptas. The new form of Brahmanism, called Hinduism, had begun to arise about this time, which needed a new kind of mythology based on a mixture of metaphysics and history. This need was provided by the Purāṇic literature. It also served the useful purpose of providing linkages between the old and the new belief.

The Guptas were followed by Hūṇas from central Asia who carried devastation wherever they went. Punjab lost a great deal of her precious religious and cultural heritage due to their atrocities. Then came the Vardhanas of Thanesar (later Kanauj) under whose rule only a part of the Punjab formed part of their empire. The rest of the region was under the local chiefs.

The period from the 7th to the 15th century is marked by certain new developments in the religious and social spheres. Some of these developments were entirely new whereas some others occurred only within the framework of the older institutions. The Vedānta school of philosophy was as old as the Upaniṣads. One of the Darśanas, *Uttara Mīmāṃsā*, had laid special emphasis on it. Later, Bādarāyaṇa had written a treatise on it. In the 8th century, a brahmin scholar of Kerala, Śaṅkarācārya, wrote a commentary on it and recommended Vedānta as the best means of achieving salvation. He regarded Brahman (God) as the only reality, all else to him was illusory. Therefore, he held that the path of knowledge (*jñāna mārga*) is the correct and the only way of achieving liberation from the bondage of illusion (*māyā*). As against him, Rāmānuja in the 12th century stressed the worship of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa through the method of love and devotion (*bhakti mārga*). Nimbārka, Madhava and Vallabha carried the idea of *bhakti* further and preached the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu's incarnation. In matters of detail they differed from each other but on fundamentals they were practically of the same view. The idea of *bhakti* in northern India was launched by Rāmānanda, a disciple of Rāmānuja. Unlike his spiritual *guru* and other advocates of the *bhakti mārga* in the South, he preached the worship of Lord Rāma as Viṣṇu's incarnation. His ideas regarding caste inhibitions were more liberal and he had many (so-called) low-caste people, like Ravi Das (a cobbler) and Kabir (a weaver), among his disciples. In the 16th century Caitanya in Bengal and Orissa was

preaching the cult of Kṛṣṇa worship. Two points in this connection need special mention. The worship of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma dated from very old times but in the medieval period they were no longer regarded as human figures but were taken as the very God Himself. Secondly, their spouses had also now been admitted into their respective cults. Now Sītā-Rām had taken the place of Rāmā, and Rādhā Kṛṣṇa the place of Kṛṣṇa.

All these were different brands of Vaiṣṇavism. Śaivism too had a number of forms including the one that believed in the worship of Lord Śiva through *bhakti*. *Śiva-linga* was considered the symbol of Śiva and worshipped as such. Quite a sizable section of the devotees of Lord Śiva, however, took to the path of asceticism, and were known as Nāthas, Siddhas or Yogis. Their main object was to attain the spiritual stage of *sahaj ananda* (equipoise and happiness). This was to be attained through the instrumentality of yoga. They generally cut themselves adrift from the world and lived the life of renunciation as recluses, depending for their livelihood upon public charity. Later on, they went astray and became more interested in the development of miraculous powers than in the achievement of their chief objective. Otherwise, they held liberal ideas. They were opposed to ritualism, veneration of brahmins and the caste system.

Then there were *Śāktas* who worshipped one goddess or another as the supreme creative power of the universe. Durgā, Kālī, Ambā, Nainā Devī, Chintpūrnī, etc., were some of the various forms of the goddess chosen for worship. The worship of *Śakti* (the goddess) was often associated with Tantrism—a Hindu movement that was quite separate from the other currents and which had its own sacred writings *tantras*, and its own ways of worshipping a deity, mostly a female one. The emphasis in Tantrism was on elements of mysticism and magic, and also on rites and conduct prohibited by Hinduism (orgies and marriage beyond one's caste).

Unlike the followers of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śāktism, the Brahmanical priesthood unnecessarily paraded their knowledge of their scriptures. Their emphasis was more on the formal aspects of their religion than on its spiritual ones. Performance of prescribed rites and ceremonies, pilgrimage of religious places, observance of caste discipline, veneration of cows and brahmins and reading of religious texts were given the greatest emphasis by them.

Another school of religious thought was represented by a band of Sants. Among them the most prominent names were Ravi Dās, Kabir, Nām Dev, Tukā Ram, Ek Nāth, Rām Dās, Pīpā, Saiṅ and Dhannā. They were devotees of neither Rāma nor Kṛṣṇa. They worshipped God Himself and had no faith in His reincarnations (*avatāras*). Their emphasis chiefly was on love and devotion and not any formal mode of worship or asceticism. They were mainly drawn from the (so-called) lower classes and were severe critics of Brahmanism and the caste system. This Sant tradition was subsequently

carried further by Guru Nānak and his successors in the Punjab by evolving a synthesis of the Sant and the Nātha traditions.*

Our account of the religious situation in the medieval age before the 15th century will not be complete without taking due notice of the new, religious force introduced into the country by the advent of Islam. First Arabs tried to penetrate the Punjab from the south, but they could not advance beyond Multan. About three centuries later Ghaznavide Turks made their entry from the north-west under their leader Mahamud. They succeeded in establishing their sway over the Punjab up to the line of the Satluj. Their rule continued until it was replaced by the Ghorid Turks at the end of the 12th century. Thereafter, several Turkish and Afghan dynasties ruled in India. With the coming of the Turks a new religion, Islam, entered the country. In West Punjab, particularly, whole tribes like Tiwanas, Sials, Gakhars, Janjuas, etc., accepted the new faith with a view to preserving their social status.

Like the Hindus, Muslim too were divided into several sects, the most prominent among them being Sunnis and Shias. The religious leaders of the Sunnis who formed the bulk of the Muslim society were called *Ulamā*, who corresponded to the brahmins of the Hindu society. Like the latter, the *Ulamā* too laid maximum stress on the observance of the formal practices of Islam, such as daily *nimāz*, *rozā*, *haj* and *zakāt*. They were also ever anxious to add to the number of their small community through conversions. Among the Muslim, Sufis represented the most liberal elements. They belonged to various order or *silsilās* and on some points of doctrine differed sharply from each other. Still they helped create a conducive atmosphere in which the different communities of the country could have peaceful co-existence.

The advent of Islam brought many new religious ideas into our country which were bound to have their impact on the Hindu society. The new situation thus created required a new thinking and readjustments, if necessary. Both the brahmins and the yogis of the Hindu society, however, reacted negatively to this situation. The brahmins sought safety in tightening up the stronghold of their caste system so as to keep their community away from the influence of the new ideas. The yogis adopted an escapist approach and preferred to lead a life of indifference towards worldly problems. A vacuum was thus created which was filled by the emergence of a new leadership arising from the commercial classes. The new leadership recognized the urgency of a new socio-religious approach. It was in these circumstances that Sikhism, a new religion, made its appearance in the Punjab.

*The editor feels unable to subscribe to the views of author that Guru Nanak evolved a synthesis of the existing traditions. Guru Nanak created altogether a new religion.—Editor.

SIKHISM : ITS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN CIVILIZATION

GOPAL SINGH

I

Sikhism has been defined by most historians—otherwise well-meaning and scholarly, though casual in their treatment of this faith—as an offshoot of the Bhakti movement. The Hindu mystic renaissance of the middle ages, emphasising the oneness of God and man's direct emotional relationship with His Personal or Absolute Reality, irrespective of caste or creed. But, as we shall see, the scriptural authority the Bhaktas built their thesis upon was the Veda (or more particularly Vedanta), and the loving adoration (Bhakti) of God was to be offered to any one of the incarnations of Vishnu, both of which doctrines Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, repudiated. There are other fundamental differences; also like the Bhakta emphasis on renunciation, contempt for women, spiritual indifference to, not total repudiation of, caste as a social force and non-involvement with a dynamic, purposive life, in all of which Nanak took a different and more earth-aware course.

Others, even more superficial, have looked upon this movement as a synthesis of the fundamentals (whatever the term might imply) of Hindu Bhakti and Muslim Sufi-ism. If anything, Nanak's basic inspiration was indigenous, even pre-Aryan, and he, as we shall see, either rejected or wholly gave a different meaning to the basic concepts and doctrines of both Hinduism and Islam. "My God is neither in the Veda nor in the Semitic texts, for He is beyond both, being a Living Presence."

Still others, more recent, though most casual and ignorant both of the Sikh Scriptures and the original historical records, have interpreted Sikhism as a kind of Punjabi nationalism which lies to-day in shambles before our very eyes. Incidentally, Nanak (nor any other of the Sikh Gurus) ever so much has mentioned the word "Punjab" in his extensive writings. Though born in the Punjab, his tours took him not only to the entire sub-continent of India but also to Ceylon, Tibet and the Middle East. Certainly he wasn't out to propagate "Punjabi nationalism" there. But, even statesmen of great vision like Mahatma Gandhi and literary geniuses like Rabindra Nath Tagore have seen in the evolution of the Sikh movement from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind

Singh a degeneration of the world of the spirit (of which Nanak was such a superb expression) into the cult of the sword in the hands of the tenth and the last Guru. Tagore, however, wrote his thesis before he witnessed the horrors of the two world wars in the present century, and Gandhiji lived to repudiate his own thesis of "non-violence in all circumstances" by blessing the defence and selfless resistance of the Poles to Hitler's onslaught in 1939 as "non-violent" being offered in self-defence.¹ As we shall see, it is to the eternal glory of the Sikh movement that the sword was drawn only when all other means had been exhausted, and under the leadership of the Gurus, always in self-defence. Victories were won, but its fruits were never claimed in the form of territory or reparations. And even when a sovereign empire was created, its fruits were shared equally with all and religion was separated from the affairs of the State.²

No notice, however, need be taken of those who have termed Sikhism as a Hindu challenge to the growing might of Islam, both political and military, during the Mughal period, as the Gurus at no time accepted this as one of their social or religious aims. On the contrary, Muslims fought along with the Hindus as the collaborators of the Sikhs throughout history for the ideals their Gurus cherished and proclaimed. And those eminent historians like Sir J.N. Sarkar who see nothing unique or original in this movement and dismiss it as a casual aberration on the historical process are better left unanswered. From the fruit only can one judge the quality of the seed. And, in the present as much as in the past, the significant Sikh contribution (in spite of their small number) to the integrity, the polity and the economy of the Indian sub-continent and the religious idea of the world is there for anyone to see.

However, at times a historian (not necessarily a Sikh) with a perceptive vision has risen to point to the basic uniqueness of the Sikh movement. One such was Qazi Noor Mohammed, a bitter enemy of the Sikh creed, who in his eye-witness account of the Sikh struggle against the Mughals of the eighteenth century, in his *Jangnama*, has paid tribute to the Sikh ideals such as only a man of far-seeing and catholic mind alone could do. Another distinguished name is that of Joseph D. Cunningham (1812-1852), the author of "A History of the Sikhs" (1848), who was an eyewitness to the first Anglo-Sikh war. Still another was the well-known philosopher-poet of the present century, Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal, the dream-builder of Pakistan.³ And mention must also be made of the Emperor Jehangir, the persecutor of the fifth Guru Arjan Dev, who also though unexpectedly, understood the basic-significance of the Sikh movement and hence tried to destroy it as soon as possible.

Qazi Noor Mohammed accompanied Ahmad Shah Abdali in his invasion of India in 1764. This is what he has to say about the Sikhs who fought bitterly against his master :

"Do not call Sikhs 'dogs' (*sag*) because they are brave like lions on the battlefield. If you want to learn the art of war, then learn from them on the

field of battle.....When engaged in giving charities, they surpass even Hatim. When they take the sword in hand, they gallop from Hind to the country of Sind and nobody, however, strong and substantial, can dare oppose them. The body of each of them looks like a mountain and in grandeur excels fifty men".

"If their troops take to flight, do not consider it a defeat. It is a trick of their mode of war. May God forbid the repetition of such a fraud. They resort to such deception in order to make the angry enemy grow bold and to run in their pursuit. When they find them (the pursues) separated from their main body and cut off from all help and reinforcement, they at once turn back and give them the hardest time possible".

What is, however, more significant is the following observation of his, which, according to him, distinguishes the Sikh warrior from the usual run :

"In one thing they excel all other warriors. They never kill a coward and do not obstruct one who flees from the field. They do not rob a woman of her gold, may she be a queen or a slave-girl. Adultery does not exist among these 'dogs'. None of them is a thief."

Not only this, but, as we shall see later on, not one of the wars that the Sikhs or their Gurus waged, was to carve an independent territory for *themselves*, nor did they impose their way of life upon any other through force or fraud. Their small numbers (they are 10 million in India according to the Census of 1971 and about 2 million abroad) are due not merely to the strict discipline, moral and spiritual, they are enjoined upon to observe, but also because proselytisation has never been pursued by them even in the hey-days of their empire. In fact, till lately, seekers for initiation into their fold were normally discouraged from joining their ranks unless a man attained maturity of thought to adopt the Sikh way of life which meant the dedication of all one had—body, mind and riches—to the cause of the Guru. It was like walking on the razor's edge.

Joseph D. Cunningham was a rare and perhaps the first European, who, in spite of many mistakes of fact he commits in delineating the life of the Sikh Gurus (though his account of the first Anglo-Sikh war is the most authoritative), had grasped the fundamentals of the Sikh faith, not as a mere movement of reform or an offshoot of Bhakti, but as something more cataclysmic :

"It has been usual to regard the Sikhs as essentially Hindu and they doubtless are so in language and everyday customs, for Gobind did not fetter his disciples with political systems or codes of municipal laws; yet in religious faith and worldly aspirations, they are wholly different from other Indians, and they are bound together by an object unknown elsewhere. But the misapprehension need not surprise the public nor condemn our scholars, when it is remembered that the learned of Greece and Rome misunderstood the spirit of those humble men who obtained a new life by baptism. Tacitus

and Suetonius regarded the early Christians as a mere Jewish sect; they failed to perceive the fundamental difference, and to appreciate the latent energy and real excellence of that doctrine which has added dignity and purity to modern civilization."

He continues : "The last apostle of the Sikhs (Guru Gobind Singh) did not live to see his own ends accomplished but he effectually roused the dormant energies of a vanquished people, and filled them with a lofty though fitful longing for social freedom and national ascendancy, the proper adjuncts of that purity of worship which had been preached by Nanak. Gobind saw what was yet vital, and he relumed it with Promethean fire. A living spirit possesses the whole Sikh people, and the impress of Gobind has not only altered the constitution of their minds, but has operated materially and given amplitude to their physical frames.⁵ The features and external form of a whole people have been modified, and a Sikh chief is not more distinguishable by his stately person and free and manly bearing than a minister of his faith is by a lofty thoughtfulness of look, which marks the fervour of his soul, and his persuasion of the near presence of the Divinity."⁶

Emperor Jehangir (1567-1627), who got the fifth Guru Arjan Dev, executed in 1606, had also seen in the Sikh movement something more than a mere movement of religious reform or a novel spiritual adventure. Though he cites the "help" (in the form of a blessing) given by the Guru to his rebel son, Khusrav, as the main cause of the Guru's execution (which excuse as we shall discuss later on, is wholly spurious), he lets himself out on a more fundamental reason in his autobiography "Tuzak-i-Jehagiri", when he writes :

"At Goindwai, on the bank of the river Beas, lived a Hindu, Arjun (Guru Arjan Dev) by name, in the garb of a Pir or Sheikh. *Thus, many innocent Hindus and even foolish Muslims he brought into his fold who beat the drum noisily of his selfappointed prophethood.* He was called Guru. From all sides worshippers came to offer their homage to him and put full trust in his word. For three or four generations, they had warmed up their shop. For a long time I had harboured a wish that I should set aside this 'shop of falsehood' or I should bring him into the fold of Islam." (p. 35).

So that it was not a mere Hindu reformer who was being put to death by an orthodox Muslim emperor, but one whose instruction even "foolish" Musalmans were also accepting (and for which reason his father, Akbar, the Great, the founder of *Din-i-Ilahi*, had come personally to pay homage to the Guru at Goindwal). This is what made Sikhism a "shop of falsehood", for it was being acknowledged by *both Hindus and Musalmans*. Not for nothing had Guru Nank raised his unusual slogan : "There is no Hindu, no Musalman", when he entered first upon his divine mission, late in the fifteenth century.

Some influential leaders of Muslim sects, like Mirza Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian (1835-1905 A.D.), head of the Qadiani sect, have tried to establish

that Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was a devout Muslim (how else, he argues, could he visit the Mecca, or accept a robe of honour in Baghdad on which is inscribed the entire text of the Quaran, and how otherwise would Muslims argue and fight for claiming his dead body, etc—"Sat Bachan", Urdu second edition 1902, pp.4377-4504) while some scholarly Hindu historians, like Indu Bhushan Banerjee, have claimed that Nanak was as a good and devout Hindu as any other Bhakta and that he challenged, and changed, nothing in their way of life, neither caste nor the sacred thread, nor the authority of the Hindu Scriptures, etc. ("Evolution of the Khalsa").

But, a far more perceptive philosopher-poet of India, Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal (1876-1938 A.D.) asserts that "when our nation did not heed the illuminating message of Gautam the Buddha and recognised not the worth of this unique jewel of a man, rose Nanak, the complete man, in the Punjab to proclaim the message of *Touhid* (the oneness of God)."

Iqbal could have added that while the oneness of God was proclaimed by many before Nanak, not so the oneness of man which was the more distinctive contribution of the founder of the Sikh faith. Perhaps, sensing the ample distinction, Iqbal did not attribute Nanak's emergence as a great world-teacher to the influence of Islam, but to a far older order, that of Gautam the Buddha, who though he did not believe in God as Person or the Human soul⁷ partaking of His essence, yet preached the gospel of one man⁸ not through the language of the gods or his chosen priests, but of common speech, cutting through all intermediaries, the sacred texts, sacrifices and rituals, the myth and the miracle and the interventionist role of the gods and goddesses. That the Hinyana or Theravadin original teaching of the Buddha was accepted less and less (more particularly its emphasis on self-culture-Arhat-hood—and withdrawal and its teachings directed more to the monks than to laymen), the Mahayana, the great vehicle, or the more numerous order which was accepted by most people in Asia transformed the great Buddha into a God whose compassion could not only be invoked through prayer, worship and meditation, but even more through good works for others—the ideal of Bodhisattva—thus bringing it more and more in line with the Sikh thought. For, no other religion—bar the Christian—emphasises so much the ethical conduct being a necessary adjunct of spiritual life as the Buddhist and the Sikh. As in Buddhism, directives in such minute details⁹ are given in the Sikh Scriptures and the biographies of the Sikh Gurus and their devout followers that the discerning eye of Mohammed Iqbal could not but visualise a closeness between the two faiths, as casual observers would indeed fail to mark. The Middle Path, or the Madhyamik school of Buddhist thought (neither ascetic self-torture, nor excessive self-indulgence) also is a common ground between the two.

Another Similarity may also be of interest to the students both of religion and history. Though the Buddha was born on the borders of Eastern India,

and for a time—i.e. after a lapse of about three centuries after his death during the reign of Ashoka and for some two centuries afterwards—spread to the whole of India, its original doctrine was soon lost, and with the Buddha being accepted as one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu it became a part of the all-absorbing Hindu belief. It was, however, in the North-West of India—the Valley of Gandhar—where, since the beginning of the Christian era, the purity of the doctrine was preserved and preached. It was at the University of Taxila, where scholars and pilgrims came from Afghanistan, China, Tibet, Ceylon, Thailand, Turkistan, Malaysia and Cambodia to drink deep at the fount of the Buddhist doctrine in its true manifestation. The Gandhara School of Art developed here—no doubt under the influence of the Greeks—to take the highly intellectualised message of the Buddha to the common masses through an emotional and aesthetic approach, and prayer and worship and the doctrine of the Bodhisatva, besides meditation, became a part of the great Mahayana sect which did much to propagate the Buddha's message to far off lands, including China and Japan. It must be remembered that it was under Kanishka, the ruler of the North-Western India of the first century A.D., that a great assembly of the world Buddhists was held to bridge the growing cleavage between the various schools of Buddhism notably between Hinayana and Mahayana.

This is also the land where the Aryans first found their settlements and the Hindus of later days found their name (derived from, "Sindhu" or the inhabitants of the land of Sind and its tributaries, their basic religious doctrines and their civilization which have stood the test of several millennia. It is here that the Rig Veda, the main corpus of the Brahminic faith, found its first utterance, as also the Bhagavad Gita, which reconciled various modes or moods of attaining to the Supreme. But, strangely enough though the Buddha calls his religion "Arya Dharma" and was himself an Aryan prince, he derived his main inspiration from the the pre-Aryan civilization, now called the Dravidian, and whose main contributions have been monism as against the Aryan polytheism, secular more than ethereal, spiritual more than metaphysical. And those were also the traits that centuries later, when whatever was left of Buddhism had degenerated into Tantric ritual and the main body was driven out of India to find its home elsewhere and when Hinduism or more specifically Brahminism had become a matter of form rather than inner illumination, and could no longer face the challenge of Islam at the spiritual even more than the physical level that there arose "a complete man" called Nanak, to challenge the Semitic as much as the Aryan view of life.

One of the more significant matters in which Guru Nanak and his successors derived inspiration from their pre-Aryan past was their repudiation of the Village-culture propagated by the Aryans, as against the city-civilization of the Harappa-Mohenjodaro period which the Aryans from Central Asia

had uprooted and destroyed. It is in this part of India that most of the Gurus were born and their instructions struck firm roots. Historians have to date taken no notice whatever of this significant fact that no Guru settled down in his ancestral village and more often than not built a new model town for his family and followers to move to and farm or trade in. As we shall see later on, these townships were not founded by the Gurus to escape the wrath or jealousy of their relations, or the relations of their predecessors, as has been suggested by some historians, but to give a new and fuller content to the secular living of their began to speculate more on the other world and the nothingness of life, than the joys and the beauties of here and now. Most scholars are of the opinion that the dark-coloured aborigines of the Indus valley civilization (now known as Dravidians and mostly inhabiting Southern India), like the Jats of the Punjab are scythian in origin and came from Central Asia, whose one branch migrated as far south in Europe as Bulgaria.¹⁰

They observed no caste (e. g. in the south, even now there are no Kshatriyas or Vaishas and upto now, among the Punjab aborigines, like Sansis, no ceremony is complete without drinking and dancing. There was no priestly class among them. Upto the time of the Rig Veda (composed mostly in the Punjab), the culture of the pre-Aryans is sought to be assimilated by and large by the immigrants, especially the love of life and its secular joys, but later looked upon for the same reason with scorn.¹¹ The Punjab, the first home of the Aryans, is now termed "an impure land when Vedic sacrifices are not performed". The magnificent hair-styles of women on Mohenjodaro seals, the urbane living standards, the building of structures for the convenience of the citizens rather than the temples for gods and palaces and tombs for kings as in contemporary Egypt, besides other factors narrated above, reveal that it was a predominantly secular civilization, "advanced and singularly uniform, closely akin, but in some respects even superior to that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt." Their public baths, municipal Government and drainage system are still the marvel of the Sumerian civilisation of that period," writes Jawaharlal Nehru, "and their manufactures reached even the markets on the Tigris and Euphrates. Trade was not confined to raw materials and luxury articles, fish, regularly imported from the Arabian sea coasts augmented the food supplies of Mohenjodaro.¹² "Nothing", says Sir John Marshall, "that we know of in other countries at this period bears any resemblance, in point of style, to the models of rams, dogs and other animals, or to the intaglio engravings on the seals, the best of which notably the humped, short-horned bulls are distinguished by a breadth of treatment and a feeling for a line and plastic form that have rarely been surpassed in glyptic art, nor would it be possible, until the classic age of Greece, to match the exquisitely supple modelling of the two human statuettes from Harappa."

All that was beautiful or useful—and even dreadful (for it will plight

the enemy)—became sacred for the sensitive people of the Punjab, and fine jewellery, with semi-precious stones set in gold-filigree, has been unearthed from the ruins of Taxila. A vigorous school of sculpture developed here—the Gandhara school of Art as result of the inter action of the Indians of the various races like the Greeks, Chinese, pre-Muslim Turks, the Iranians, the Scythians upon each other. These fiercely independent people were governed neither by the King nor the priest, but by their duly-chosen representatives. The idea of kingship is Aryan in origin and is of later growth. The worship of images and idols in the post-Buddha period is a Greek influence ('but,' as the idol is called in Hindustani, itself is a derivative of "Buddha"), and Purdah among women was introduced by the far later Muslim conquest. Nowhere were the women honoured so much as in the Aryan* and the pre-Aryan civilization. "She is the light of the dwelling." She makes her own choice of the husband and gaily-dressed women with their hair in four knots are coveted. Even the Aryan gods live in the snowy cool of the Himalayas or beyond. They dig canals for irrigation and sow corn, beans, barley and sesame. They know the use of medicinal herbs, of weaving and spinning and also make fine leather-goods. They have among them smiths, carpenters, carriage-makers, ship-builders, goldsmiths and other artisans.

Says Arrian, the Greek historian of Alexander's campaign in the Punjab, "no nation is fonder of singing and dancing than the Indian" (meaning thereby, as is obvious, the people of the Punjab). Except for domestic servants, slavery was unknown here as it was in Greece or Rome. North India (or North-Western to be precise) was famous for her weapons of war, especially for her quality of steel, her swords and daggers. When Alexander invaded Persia, it is stated by Firdausi in his "*Shahnamah*" that swords and other weapons were hurriedly sent for by the Persians from India. This is not all. The University of Taxila, which was the capital seat of the North-Western province of Ashoka's empire, became first for the Brahmins and later for the Buddhists a foremost seat of higher learning in the whole of Asia, not only in the arts and religion, but more especially in science and medicine. The grammarian Panini, the author of the "Yoga Sutra" Patanjali, the physician Chanakya, to name only a few world-renowned masters, were all the product of the University of Taxila. The study of astrology and astronomy was pursued here as much as the study of pure mathematics, algebra and geometry. As Jawaharlal Nehru puts it, "Banaras has been centre of learning and even in Buddha's days it was old and known as such, but Banaras does not appear to have been at any time anything like a University such as existed then and later in other parts of India. There were numerous groups there, consisting of a teacher and his disciples and often between rival groups there was an ancient and famous university at Takshashila or Taxila...noted for science, especially

*Aryan scriptures, however, do not testify the statement—Editor.

medicine, and the arts and to which travelled sons of nobles and Brahmins, unattended and unarmed, to be educated. Probably students came also from Central Asia and Afghanistan. It was considered an honour to be a graduate of Taxila...Physicians who had studied there were highly thought of and it is related that whenever Buddha felt unwell, his admirers brought to him a famous physician who had graduated from Taxila."¹³

Thus, neither the pre-Aryans nor the early Aryans of the Rig Vedic period discarded the secular in preference to the spiritual. It was the Buddha, who attacked the concepts of God and the soul, so majestically expressed in the Upanishads, and the gods and goddesses of the Rig Veda identified with the forces of nature (both good and beautiful, or terrible, but by far more the former than the latter), priesthood and sacrifice, the desires of the flesh and emphasising renunciation ("for all life is pain") and non-injury to living beings, and who for a thousand years after his demise continued to influence the thought and history of Hindustan. He also attacked caste¹⁴ at least in the monastic order, if not generally. It is no marvel, however, that it (Buddhism) was uprooted from the soil of its birth and struck its roots in other countries like China, Korea, Japan, more as Mahayana (a modified form of Hinduism or Brahminism) than in its original doctrine of Hinayana, whose self-negative philosophy made it unpopular for the people of India, given with such abandon to the joy and beauty of life, to music and dance, sculpture and painting, urbane living and believing in life not only on the earth, but in the life everlasting. The rise of neo-Hinduism under Shankara with his doctrines of Maya and attributeless (Nirguna) God who was indeed identified with the individual soul accepted, by and large, the main thesis of the Buddha. Coupled with this, was the need of medieval India to arm itself and fight the invading marauders as much as local adventurers. Both these factors gave a death-blow to the existence of Buddhism in India.¹⁵

However, as it has been already pointed out, the brief interludes of foreign attacks by the Egyptians, the Persians, the Scythians or the Tartars, followed by Alexander, the Greek, made the Punjab not only the battle-ground but also opened its civilization to European and Central Asian Influences, and to trade and commerce, and the mixing of blood. But when the foreign hordes were finally expelled, we come to certain well-known names of history, whose fortune is connected virtually with the Punjab. Apart from the heroes of the war of *Mahabharata*, which was fought at Kurukshetra to the South-east of the Punjab, we come across such remarkable figures as Chandragupta Maurya, his grandson Ashoka, Governor of Taxila, before becoming emperor in the third century B.C., Kanishka, with his headquarters at Peshawar, Chandra Gupta (who driven from Patliputra, took refuge in the Punjab and helped by Punjabi men of arms became a great empire-builder in the fourth century A.D), till the Huns almost shook the Gupta empire, and the rival dynasties within India through their internecine warfare opened the door for her conquest

by the forces of Islam.

The invasions of the Muslims which started with the seventeen-year old Mohammad-bin-Kasim, an Arab general, in 711 A.D., was not meant to be a war of conquest however, but a limited engagement to rescue an Arab vessel detained at the mouth of the Indus by a Hindu Prince, Dahu. But the initial success attending upon Kasim and the enormous booty he received as a result, emboldened him to bring the whole of Sind, including Multan, under his sway, though only for a very short period for Kasim was killed and sewn in raw hide under the orders of his master (on account of the suspicion sown in his mind about Kasim's character by the two beautiful daughters of the conquered Hindu Prince who had been offered by Kasim to his master for his harem). Over two centuries later (977 A.D.), when Jaipal ruled in the Punjab, Subuktagin, a slave of Turkish extraction, assuming sovereign authority at Ghazni, attacked the Punjab but met with little territorial success, and returned with a large booty though leaving a few mosques behind. However, his heart was inflamed with thoughts of revenge for he believed to have been tricked into a withdrawal by Jaipal whom he considered he had shown magnanimity. He returned again, defeated Jaipal and annexed the western part of the Indus, exacting a heavy price for his victory. On his death, his thirty-year old son Mahmud, made it a habit to invade India for loot, his thirteenth invasion being in 1027, only three years, before his death at the age of sixty-three. Acknowledged by the entire Muslim world as its chief, and apart from the staggering booty in gold and jewels he acquired in India, his sway extended from Kashmir to Ispahan and from the Caspian Sea to the Ganges. The Indian part of the Ghaznavid empire lasted for over two centuries among the descendants of Mahmud, though bitter fights raged frequently entailing large massacre of men and destruction and looting of property, as the throne of Ghazni, changed hands or the local Hindu rajas raised their rebellious heads at the frequent intervals. For the first time during this period, large scale conversions of non-Muslims through force became the hall-mark of the onslaughts, besides the destruction and desecration of their temples and the carrying away of Hindu women and children as slaves.

It is worthwhile to dwell in any detail on those succeeding to the throne of Ghazni, like Muhammad Ghorī, who was assassinated in the Punjab; Kutab-ud-din-Aibik, the first Muslim king to be crowned at Lahore, and who later occupied Delhi and commemorated its conquest by the erection of the huge, smooth tapering Qutab-Minar in red stone on which were inscribed the verses from the Holy Quam—a marvel still of architectural daring, beauty and design. He was followed by the Slave-dynasty brought about both by merit and marriage into the royal household though during this period Delhi became the chief centre of learning and the resort of holymen, including Farid-ud-Din, Ganj-i-Shankar of the Punjab (whose work is included in the Sikh Scripture) and his disciple Khwaja Qutab-ud-din Bakhtair Kaki, and others.

Ghazni was now more an appendage of Delhi than vice-versa. Once the Punjab had fallen, as it did finally in 1001 A.D., the way was now open for the conquerors from the North-West. to bring the entire of North and East India, if not also substantial parts of the South, under their sway.

For a time, Persian became the language of the court and the elite, and a new hybrid language, built on *Khari boli* or the dialect of the country around Delhi and Mathura, but with a liberal admixture of Persian and Arabic vocabulary started being evolved. The Sufi orders of Islam, accepting much of Hindu thought and practice, did much to popularise Islam especially among the lower and untouchable classes of the Hindus. Meantime, Chengiz Khan, the Mongol pagan (1221-22), his grandson Halaku, and various other descendants of Chengiz invaded the Punjab, one after another, late in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century A.D., but were defeated. It was, however, one of the descendants of Chengiz's son-in-law, Khalij Khan, who becoming a convert to Islam and settling down with a large number of families in the mountainous west of the Punjab (where their progeny still remains) rose in the favour of the Ghazni kings, usurped the throne of Delhi, and founded the dynasty of the Khaljis. They were followed by the Tughlaks, their founder Ghiasud-Din taking his name from his father, a Turkish slave of India's slave-king, Balban. They halted the attacks of the Mongols (or Moghols) and even attacked them in their own country. The invasion of Timur or Tamarlane of Samarkand also of Mongol blood, in 1398 A.D., however, brought about their downfall accompanied by savage butcher plunder and devastation, the worst sufferers again being the people of the Punjab, notably at Talamba, Dipalpur and Bhatner. The whole districts of Multan and Lahore were totally ravaged. Delhi especially was deluged in blood. All prisoners of war, numbering a hundred thousand, were put to the sword. Hindu women were outraged in large numbers by Timur's soldiery and the city of Delhi set upon fire. Soon, however, he was on his way back home, though he committed much pillage and wholesale slaughter on the way, compelling many people, including the Raja of Jammu, to embrace Islam.

The Tughlaks, who built an empire as extensive as that of Ashoka, including parts of the South, were followed by the imbecile Sayyads (1414—50 A.D.) from whom the throne was captured by the Lodhis under Bahlol (1451-88 A.D.), Governor of the Punjab, whose ancestors were from a commercial Afghan tribe and who won, through both personal chivalry and intrigue, the throne of Delhi, the titular King adopting him as his son. He was, however, a mild and just Prince, treating his courtiers as his friends and seldom mounted the throne "in order to avoid display of authority". In his early days, he was even fond of visiting the darveshes and claimed his throne being the blessings of one of them. His son, Sikandar Lodhi (1488-1517), from a Hindu wife, was a man of literary and religious disposition and distributed alms to the needy Muslims every Friday, though, being a bigot,

he demolished many Hindu temples of historic import, as at Mathura, and raised mosque on their ruins, considering this as an act of piety. He prohibited the Hindus bathing at the sacred river-banks (*ghats*). The shaving of beards and heads by the Hindus at the pilgrim-stations was forbidden, and a brahmin of Bengal who had declared Islam and Hinduism, both, to be true religions, was beheaded on his refusal to accept Islam. Otherwise, he was "a good and capable ruler" and cared deeply for the welfare of his subjects, taking personal pains in the matter of prices, weights and measures, and charities to the poor. He never changed an established custom and deprived no one of his *Jagir*. Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-1526), his son, who succeeded him, imprisoned his own brother and later put him to death. He was an extremely cruel and a vicious man and created many enemies among the Afghan nobles, including Daulat Khan Lodhi, the Governor of the Punjab (of whom we shall have to speak much later on). His uncle, Ala-ud-Din, fled to Kabul and collecting a body of 40,000 horse attacked him, joined by Daulat Khan. Though defeated in the war, Ala-ud-Din escaped to the Punjab and egged on by him, Daulat Khan sent his agents to Kabul to urge Babur, the Mughal ruler there, and a great-grandson of Timur, to invade India, whose throne after three or four partial attempts, he finally won in 1526, and established the Mughal dynasty which lasted over three hundred years and seven generations.

Nanak (1469-1538 A.D.) was contemporary of the Lodhi dynasty, and of Babur, whose descendants, as we shall see, had much to do with the house of Nanak, and who with very few exceptions and for a brief period of history kept themselves on the best of terms with the Sikh Gurus for a period extending to about two centuries (the last Sikh Guru breathed his last in 1708 A.D.).

Here we must pause to deliberate upon the socio-political conditions of the age which witnessed also the birth of Nanak, the Guru, as to how far they affected his life and message and also vice-versa.

Much has been written about the Muslim violence and tyranny, the bigotry, the forced wholesale conversions of the subject peoples, the destruction of Hindu temples and total denigration of their religion and age-old customs and beliefs; the imposition of *Jezia*, a discriminatory religious tax, the denial to them of public service, and the dishonouring and carrying away as slaves of Hindu women and the imposition of purdah on the rest, etc., etc.¹⁶ But, much should not be read into this wholesale condemnation of the conquering faith of Islam. It must be noted that in the medieval ages, wars in Europe, even between the Christians of various denominations, were far more violent. It may be true that during the Hindu period of Indian history or whatever is known of it, from the rule of Ashoka (he came to the throne in 273 B.C.) to the death of Harsha (647 A.D.), the wars were more humane and the various religions—Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism, Tantricism or animism—as much as the various races, Aryan and Dravidian, Scythian and Mongolian, Greek and Persian, all co-existed side by side in comparative peace or coalesced

with each other, unobtrusively, as time passed. But, instances are not unknown in which bloodshed, cunning and intrigue, wholesale conversions, destruction of each other's temples, and looting and burning of property and carrying away of women as the war-booty or dishonouring them were the order of the day.

Aryans destroyed not only the well-built walled cities but uprooted wholesale the culture of the pre-Aryan Dravidians, through war and violence, and treated the aboriginies as second-class citizens, if not pariahs, as references to them in the Rig Veda amply testify. Later, Aryans clashed with each other, and the wily intrigues of a woman, Kaikei, at the court of Ayodhya which led to the banishment of Sri Rama, the noble rightful heir to the throne, abduction of his wife, Sita, and the resultant war with the utter rout of Ravana, a brahmin king, through the defection of his own brother, Vibhishana, as much as the superior, death-dealing arms of Sri Rama's forces have so impressed our race that upto date we do not cease to re-create the bloody drama with all its attendant violence and vileness. The war of Mahabharata is even a more classic example of brother shedding the blood of brother and reckless killings, the dishonouring of the enemy's womenfolk, including Draupadi, who was stripped naked in the open court of Dushasana, and the practice of various deceptions forbidden by religion but sanctified by expediency. Reference has already been made to the terrible carnage in the war of Kalinga waged by the noble Ashoka, "in which 1,50,000 persons were carried away captive, 1,00,000 were slain on the battlefield and many times that number died". The last of the powerful, Hindu kings, Harsha (died 647 A.D.), according to the Chinese pilgrim, Hsuan Tsang (or Yuan Chwang) "went from east to west subduing all who were not obedient. His elephants were not unharnessed nor the soldiers unhelmeted." He kept a force of 60,000 elephants, 1,00,000 cavalry and 50,000 infantry and except for the Punjab, subjugated the whole of upper India, not excluding Bihar and a large part of Bengal.

When the Muslims appeared finally on the soil of India, at least for three centuries in the beginning (900 A.D. to 1200 A.D.), the Hindu India, divided into caste and clan, was fighting grim battles, one with the other, and not un-often siding with the invader than with each other to contain the foreign onslaughts.

It was a Hindu general, who fought along, with Mir Kasim against his own King. The Jats of Sind, governed ruthlessly by a brahmin usurper at this time, refused to be on the ruler's side. The story of Jaichand of Kanauj (who extended his dominion from Kanauj to Bihar) siding with Ala-ud-Din Khilji against Prithiraj Chauhan of Delhi due to a family feud is well-known, though what is less known is his invasion of the territory of Chandels and the defeat of their king, Paramardi. According to Kalhana's *Rajtarangini* "Harsha (a ruler of Kashmir from 1089 to 1109 A.D.) displayed in his chequered life a strange combination of cruelty and kindheartedness, liberality and greed,

violent selfwilledness and reckless supineness, cunning and want of thought" King Sankaravarnan of Kashmir (883-902 A.D.) made himself notorious by his extortionist greed, oppressive taxation and temple looting. The great and wise King Bhoja of Malwa (1010-1065 A.D.) "carried on incessant warfare with all the surrounding (Hindu) kingdoms-Chedi, Lata and Karnata. While Bhima I, King of Gujrat invaded Singh, Bhoja attacked Gujrat. He, in turn, was attacked by Southern Chalukya King, Someshwara II. Mulraja of Gujrat became a great ruler by attacking Cutch, Kathiawar and Ajmer. For long years, a three-cornered struggle began between the Gujrat, the Palas of Gujrat and the Rashtra Katas of the Deccan for the overlordship of North India. The Cholas, the Pandayas and the Cheras in the South repeated this performance. How could any composite culture or a soulful religion flourish in such a state of affairs?

No wonder, the Muslims soon filled this vacuum in an atmosphere of cultural decadence, internecine warfare and religious confusion. But once the Muslim power settled itself in the throne of Delhi, it is one Muslim race fighting against another of their own faith, Turk against the Arab, Afghan against the Turk, Persian against the Mongol, Pathan against Pathan. Sunni against Shia and the Hindus were only incidentally involved. Initially, there was bound to be large-scale tyranny, loot, bloodshed and discrimination, but once the throne of Hindustan was assured to a Muslim dynasty, it is the Sufis who propagated the cult of Islam (which did not negate higher Hinduism, and indeed assimilated many local customs and beliefs) and not the fire and the sword¹⁷. Individual marauders and sectarian monarchs cannot be picked upon to make out a general case against the recklessness of Islam as such. The Islam that came to India, or took root in its soil, was only a name and a form. The content to all intents and purpose, had been Indianised (if not Hindu-ised) which used persuasion rather than coercion upon the subjects to join a society more egalitarian than their own. Were it not so, the Hindus would not be a majority people to this day after a thousand years of Muslims rule. What saved them was not their resistance (for, they actively collaborated with the state apparatus after a time, for long years as *Hindus*), but the Islamic society itself had become, as time passed, permissive and the rulers, though nominally Muslim, became interested more in the safety and splendour of the dominions and good and easy life of the court than spreading the exclusive gospel of Islam in return for a promised heaven in the Hereafter. Music and dance, drinking bouts and orgies, paintings of the court's splendour and of intimate lovelore, erotic poetry (much of which under the guise of symbols also challenged the exclusive doctrines of Islam), harems and howties, self-aggrandisement and palace intrigue, the deification of the King as *Zil-e-ilahi* and the denigration of the *ulema* became the rule rather than the exception. It may all have been against the orthodox precept of the prophet Mohammad and the practice of his caliphs and its rewards more immediate than the

pledges to be redeemed in the after-life. For both sides, therefore, the game was not glitter and glory. The hardy desert-man and the mountain-warrior had now tasted civilization.

As will be seen later, though (Guru) Nanak's contemporary Afghan King, Ibrahim Lodhi, was reckless, and thus invited the wrath of his own nobles and a successful Mughal invasion not so, by and large, the contemporary kings of Nanak's birth and youth—Bahlol and Sikandar Lodhi. Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi, Governor of Punjab, in fact became a near disciple of Nanak, all of whose early companions, including the village-chief Rai Bular and Bhai Mardana, his life-long companion, were Muslims. His Persian teacher : Qutab-ud-din, revered him as guru. Not for nothing did he visit the Mecca and other stations of Muslims pilgrimage as he did in respect of the Hindus, unharmed and unmolested. And, as we have said above, most of the Mughal kings were on the best of terms with the house of Nanak.

What is it, then, that made (Guru) Nanak prophet and a seer in the eyes of both Hindus and Muslims. If it be some kind of a synthesis between the two creeds that he is claimed to have attempted, then Kabir and a host of his near-contemporaries, like Tukaram, Chandidas, Ravidas, et al. had certainly preceded Nanak in preaching the gospel of the one God (which doctrine, it is stressed by many, was under the influence of Islam, as if the concept was not known to the Hindus for at least two millennia before the birth of Prophet Mohammad), castelessness, and the cult of Bhakti (loving adoration of God) etc. The Muslim Sufis were stressing the same ideals no less. And, though the basic doctrines of Nanak's faith were essentially Hindu—the belief in *Karma*, transmigration and *Nirvana* or *Moksha* being the end of all life activity, as we shall see, he wholly transformed the meaning of these concepts. And yet he was accepted as guru by the Hindu no less than the Muslim. He did the same in respect of almost every basic doctrine of Islam, including that of *Tauhid*. Whosoever compares with some seriousness and studies the spiritual discipline propounded by Nanak and the one propagated by the Sufis would find more to differentiate than to obviate all distinction between the two. To take only one instance, Nanak's five *Khands* (as enunciated in his composition, the *Japuji*) and the Sufis' seven stages of spiritual evolution have practically very little in common.

The basis of the uniqueness of his message lies, therefore, not in the synthesis of the two 'warring' creeds, but in giving a new depth and dimension to the basic concepts of both, while denouncing their outer manifestations in each case. To take only a few examples : while both Hindus and Muslims stressed the concept of one God, it was Nanak who proclaimed the concept also of one man; while to the Muslim Sufi, as such as to the Hindu Vedantist, only a particular path alone could lead to man's salvation, according to Nanak, all paths that led to the same goal were sanctified and worthy of man's highest attention. According to both, the final revelation had either been made by

God through the Veda or the Quran, according to Nanak, God revealed himself from age to age, and though the Truth did not change, its interpretations and media did, according to the demands of the times. The world did not come into being in a single atomic explosion nor could its age be finally determined, but it evolved from one stage to another, through aeons of years. "God first created the air, from the air came water and from water throbbed the three worlds into being, including the world of man." "God does not shower His gifts on the chosen races and men, but on all men at all times." "He has put into the world whatever He had to once for all." "It is man who had to search out, analyse and make compounds of God's elements, exploit them and distribute them in equity and in good faith." It is not God, therefore, who is to be blamed for our misery, but man. God is to be praised for having blessed us with all that we would ever need and with a mind for its wholesome exploitation and equitable distribution, and a soul to dispel the ego as much as individuals as of societies and nations, and to find eternal repose, or integration of the Personality, thus rising above the limitations of time.

"There are myriads upon myriads of universe," says Nanak, "and the suns and the moons, the spheres and the stars, the worlds and the underworlds"—and "their count cannot be made by the Qazis, nor the utterers of the Puranas". "Heaven is not only in the Hereafter but also here"—so is hell. *Moksha* or redemption (or illumination) can also be attained here—by man with an integrated mind. Life is transitory, and all-too brief, and the ideal is to merge one's time-sense with the Timeless, but it is not by denying or renouncing life that the ideal can be attained, but by grappling with it, in all its fury and fantasy, not for oneself, but for others, and, what is even more important, in the name and for the sake of the ideal that is God. For, man's world is the battle-ground of God and it is to express and justify His existence, His moral law, His compassion as much as His retribution that he created the earth, and in it the man whose destiny is not to identify himself with the animal, but with the spiritual within him and within the universe, if also not beyond. He who flouts God's Moral Law finds God—and man—arrayed against him in a myriad ways. Only man has possibility to evolve into a superman, the angel, not Nietshze's ideal to overpower others, but to overpower oneself, endowed as he is with a mind and soul. Hence the life of man—and equally of woman—is sacred, and neither originates in sin, nor waits till the doomsday for a Day of judgement upon his chosen Prophet to bestow upon him a life of Eternal Bliss, or to burn ever thereafter in the Fires of Hell. To avenge in the way of God is not killing the opponent—(the *infidel* or the *Malechha*) but by converting him to his own essential self. And not by gathering goods but gathering God that one can find rest for the soul, not by building empires but by building hearts. All rituals and institutions—and all taboos of dress and diet and social behaviour—divorced from the life of the spirit are false and can please not God, nor bring quietude to the soul, only

the inner illumination and the compassion of the heart can. God is not in the Books—sacred or profane. He is a realisation, not through belief in a particular dogma, but through experience of His all-pervading Presence and Grace at all times, everywhere. His word too is echoed through the universe and in man's soul—age after age.

How vast was the conception of Guru Nanak, therefore, in respect as much of man, his universe, as of God and His revelation, and how much different from the current coin, can be seen here, in howsoever brief a manner. But, of this, more later. Suffice it to say that Nanak's spiritual—and social ideas—contradict not a whit either the discoveries of Science or the newly propounded economic theories (for, according to him, God reveals himself through man and nature in a myriad ways, each of His facets—good as well as bad—being a wonder), nor does he hand himself over, body and soul, to the merely material. The material indeed is the expression of the spiritual, as the spiritual is the justification for the material. And not by miracles is the spiritual in man or god to be judged. For, every facet of life is miraculous, every particle of nature, all laws of the universe (how uniform, never arbitrary, governed timelessly, by never-changing rule of law). Every other miracle is a trick of the muscle or the psyche, and is not worthy of a serious man's attention. The only miracle Nanak claimed for himself, therefore, was that he would teach man not how to overcome others, but how to overpower himself. And, Nanak did not believe in a sectarian state, based on geography, race, language or a particular religion. He believed in a universal man and a universal state, both man and universe being the creation (or expression) of a universal soul. If he denounced the kings as butchers and the courtiers as the running dogs, he was denouncing absolute reckless personal power as such for all times, and not in a particular age including his own. It is only in this context that Nanak's uniqueness can be ascertained and certified. His greatness lies not in his followers creating a secular empire in the North-West, two hundred and fifty years after his demise, and the successful military challenge they offered to the later Mughals¹⁸ (thus turning the tide of invasions from the West to the East after a lapse of a thousand years and the throne of Kabul, for long years the arbiter of India's destiny, exchanging hands at the mercy of the Sikh monarch at Lahore), but to the ideal of the one man and one God that he preached, of the living man and the living God. Not that his followers fought and won, but how cleanly they fought and for what purpose they won? It is Nanak as an original, idealistic thinker that should claim the attention of history, not the conquests or the material achievements of his race.

Before we conclude, it is but meet that we enunciate the Sikh view of history. Lately, attempts have been made by some "Sikh agnostics" on the one hand and non-Sikh secular historians on the other to separate the Nanak of history from Nanak, the "founder" of a world faith, and thus a man also of legend, myth and miracle. And, though the latter attempt has been lauded by

ignorant ever among the Sikhs as being in conformity with the spirit of modern, scientific age, it has served more to confuse than to illuminate Sikh history, for, the Sikh Gurus have always claimed that though they were born in time, the message they had come to declare was eternal and had come from God. "I know command of God", says Nanak. Nanak never claimed that he was either the first or the last Guru, Prophet or the Messiah. The Guru, according to him, was God, the Eternal, who always was and will always be. His word also, therefore, was heard by and communicated to mankind, age after age, by prophets and seers and will continue to be so done, though the essential core will remain the same as ever. The Sikh theory thus gives both a continuity to history as well as a uniqueness at given periods, when history ceases to move except in a narrow, selfish, status-quoist grooves, devoid of purpose and meaning, when a man of spiritual vision and moral daring rises on the scene and history pulsates with a dynamism unknown before.

The Sikh view of history, therefore is that devoid of meaning (a meaning, that is, which corresponds to the purpose of God in creation as enunciated, in eternal terms, by the Gurus), history is a sordid record of man's brutalisation of his inner self, tyranny and bloodshed, exploitation and war. Instead of movement, it is the stultification of all that is ennobling and eternal in man. Man, the individual as much as part of the social whole, is the primary test of history's worth. Nanak and his followers thus can be studied as part of history only as its redeemers and not as its victims.

Understood thus, it is easy enough to dismiss out of account, without impairing the faith of a Sikh, any event, no matter how significant in secular terms, which measures not up to his standard of judgement. Defeat, for instance in the causes of God, if crowned by martyrdom, becomes glorious and success attained at the expense of God's moral law becomes repugnant to the Sikh mind. That God intervenes in the affairs of the world on the side of those who fight, detachedly, for its secular welfare and moral health is a miracle in the form of happenings in defiance of God's natural and eternal laws, should determine a man's spiritual prowess of God-awareness if denounced vehemently by the Sikh Gurus as the work of mountebanks and charlatans. That devout chroniclers have associated miracles with the Gurus and the mass of people believe in them as an act of faith cannot lead us to conclude either, that such "blind faith" is born out of ignorance and superstition (let alone men of every religious faith, even the Marxists dogmatically "believe" in the ultimate victory of their idea and any experimentation with or improvement upon the "original doctrine" is considered a sacrilege, a heresy and deviation), or that once we separate the Nanak (or his successors) of flesh and blood from the Nanak of faith and prophecy, we shall have a true glimpse of Sikh history. For, Nanak can lay claim, unlike Babur, his kingly contemporary, to history, as understood by the Sikhs, only if he continues to move man's minds and souls (and for this reasons remains an object of worship

and prayer) throughout history, rather than at a given moment and thus becomes a more sporadic event in the relentless march of time. Nanak must remain the conqueror of time in order to claim out allegiance, and not as a push-button of history.

Unlike Islam, Sikhism did not start with a political success, but like Christianity, as a protestor against it and a martyr at its hands, but when, ultimately, there was no choice left but to fight the Mughal imperialism with its own weapons and create an empire, no one's social norms or spiritual beliefs were tempered with. The Sikhs chose to remain a minority people fighting not against but on behalf of the majority, and sharing political and military power with the others even on a more generous scale than they would have under their own dominion. Whether it was Banda Singh Bahadur or Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab, who led them to political victory and national self-assurance, the personal conduct of each one of them was made a subject of public scrutiny and if it did not accord with the Guru's mandate, it was publicly censured and even punished.¹⁹ For, to the Sikh, though earthly prosperity is sacred, not so at the expense of the moral health of the individual or the state, and those alone are fit to lead and rule who willingly submit themselves to the rules of good conduct as enunciated by the Gurus. Everyone else may be forgiven, but not the ruler of men; he must answer—and pay—for his deeds (and misdeeds). This is what has made the leadership of the Sikhs, whether spiritual or political, such a hazardous and tortuous task. No one can remain at the pinnacle for long. Time and again, it has made the Sikhs leaderless, or a victim of intriguing gangsters or ignorant maglomaniacs, or sly sycophants of the powers that be, but their days have always been numbered. But, let it be also recorded that Sikh history not only demolishes reputations, it also builds them as speedily.

And this brings us to another vital point. The Sikhs do not build their peoplehood, like the Christians, or the Arab or the Iranian Muslims or even the Hindus either on the basis of religion in its widest possible sense. That is how, it is the Saint, the Martyr and the man of compassion who has always elicited their soulful allegiance and not the man of power, or self-centred affluence.²⁰ The means for any acquisitions are more important than the ends. This trait in the Sikh character nurtured for two centuries by Gurus and employed as a measuring rod even thereafter has led also to some unfortunate consequences. Firstly, that time and again it has tied down Sikh political life to the Sikh temples and their custodians (no matter who or how they attained their authority over them) and secondly, it has kept out of the political arena some of the best and more sensitive minds of the community who have refused to be subjected to the vicious orthodoxy of the ignorant which was more often employed to keep the saner rivals out than to promote the ideals of the faith. The Gurus never intended or propagated such a self-stultifying view of the Sikh way of life as has, in recent times, been the community's misfortune to

witness.²¹

However, this trait has given the Sikhs an edge over the other communities as well, though in another not wholly unexpected way, which is generally passed over by the historians. As their religion is bound not to any particular geography, culture (in a limited sense), race or caste, they are easy to spread out and integrate themselves with other societies the world over. Believing as they do in the Universal state and the universal man (and it is their religion that teaches them this), they have been and may well again be the spearheads of many progressive movements the world over. As we shall see, early in the present century the freedom movement of India took its roots in the most dedicated (even violent) form in some of the Sikh temples (as in California, Vancouver, Malaya and Hong Kong) that the Sikh colonists had established abroad. The Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1920's merged itself entirely with the non-violent struggle for freedom led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. So did the Kooka Movement, though in a limited way, immediately after the revolt of 1857 had been crushed.²² Even the Communist Party of India have often enough participated on behalf of their nominees, in the Gurdwara elections, and departure from or denunciation of the Sikh injunctions even in the matter of form by their membership has been officially frowned upon.

Time and again, the community was almost wiped out either physically or economically (the last being in 1947 at the time of India's partition) in the middle of almost every century, during the last half a millennium, and yet it rose again from its ashes, reinforced in its belief in the never-dying laws of God and the Guru. For, just as the Sikhs look to the past to be inspired by its martyrdoms, suffered for eternal values (and not for secular profit or dominions), they look forward to the future, to give as meaningful directions to history and not to become the unwilling victims of its even living and dying process. This is why not prose but poetry is the language of both their philosophy and history.

Notes and References

1. See on Poland "*Non-violence in Peace and War*", by M.K. Gandhi (p. 240 Navjivan House) : On Kashmir, *ibid*, Vol. II (pp 321, 363). Almost every Gandhite of note in India, led by the noble Sarvodaya leader, Jaya Parkash Narayan and the spiritual heir of Mahatama Gandhi, Shri Vinoba Bhave, cried out for armed help to the forces of liberation in East Bengal in 1971, when neither appeal to the conscience of the world nor to the conscience of their persecutors was of any avail. Ultimately, what led to the freedom of Bangladesh was the resort to a clash of arms, when all the choices were closed upon India.
2. Ashoka's renunciation of war after the bloody battle of Kalinga is cited often enough to emphasise India's faith in non-violence since time immemorial. This is, however, historically not true, though India has seen, as Mr. Nehru rightly

points out in his "*Discovery of India*" for longer period peace and her wars have been far more humane, (as Dr. Basham points out in his "*The Wonder That Was India*") than in other parts of the world in the corresponding periods and even upto the present times. But, the supreme Rig Vedic god Indra, is a warrior-god; so also are Shiva and his consort, Kali or Chandi, so also are the heroes of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* worshipped through the ages as the incarnations of Vishnu. Indeed, except for the Buddha, who learnt all the arts of war (being a Kashatriya Prince) but never practised them, all the other nine incarnations of Vishnu (including the one, Kalki, who is yet to appear to destroy evil) are involved in a gigantic war or bitter struggle against injustice and oppression. As for Ashoka, the following opinion by a genuine lover of India's ancient past, Dr. A.L. Basham, may be of interest to the reader :

"It is clear that Ashoka was not a complete pacifist. The wild tribesmen of hill and forest were a constant source of danger to the more settled parts of the empire...Ashoka clearly tried to civilise them, but it is quite evident that he was ready to repress them by force if they continued their raids. He made no mention of reducing the army. Despite his remorse at the conquest of Kalinga, he was too much of a realist to restore it to its original rulers. For all his humanitarianism he maintained the death penalty, which was abolished by some later Indian Kings...Though Buddhist tradition records that he abolished judicial torture, this is not clearly stated in his edicts." (*The Wonder That Was India*, p. 54-55).

3. Here, it must be said to the credit of Iqbal's vision that in his address to the Lahore session of the All India Muslim League in 1930, he enunciated the conception of Pakistan (though he did not give it that name) as consisting only of Punjab, Sind, the Pathanland, Baluchistan and Kashmir. The idea of a second, eastern wing (or East Bengal) was an imposition of Mr. Mohammed Ali Jinnah in the Muslim League session of 1940, though he too visualised two "sovereign, independent and autonomous entities" of the two wings, which they have now become, thus defeating the forced union between the two wings solely on the basis of Islam.
4. In "*Manu Smariti*" such a code is also enunciated : "A warrior fighting from a chariot might not strike one on foot, an enemy in flight, wounded or asking quarter might not be slain; the lives of enemy soldiers who had lost their weapons were to be respected; poisoned weapons were not to be used. Homage and not annexation was the rightful fruit of victory." But, as Dr. Basham has pointed out (*The Wonder That Was India*, p. 126), this code "was not always kept."... "The heroes of *Mahabharata* infringed them many times, even at the behest of their mentor, Krishna, and the infringements are explained and pardoned by recourse to causistical arguments of expediency and necessity. The rules of war could only be maintained strictly by a King certain of victory or certain of defeat." In the later and more popular *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, however, we hear nothing of these rules.
5. This physical change was noticed also by Sir Alexander Burns (*Travels*, I, 285, and II, 39), by Elphinstone (*History of India*, II, 564) and it is also lightly struck by Malcolm (*Sketch of the Sikhs*, P. 129).
6. "*A History of the Sikhs*", p. 84-85.
7. It has been suggested that the *Nirguna* (attributeless) God of the Upanishads

and the *Shunya* (void) doctrine of the Buddha are closely inter-linked and that as the Buddha believes in transmigration what is it that transmigrates if not the soul which he describes as sense-impressions.

8. Though he kept the women by and large out of the monastic order and did not attack caste with the ruthlessness of Nanak and the succeeding Gurus.
9. See the *Vars* and *Kabits* of Bhai Gurdas; *Sikhan di Bhagat Mala* by Bhai Mani Singh; *Rahitnamas* of Bhai Nandlal, Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Chaupa Singh; *Janam Sakhis* of Mehervan and Bala and of the India office, London; *Gur-partap Surya Granth* and *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, etc. Dabistan quotes such fantastic stories about the commission and charitable nature of the Sikhs of the Guru period that though they seem shocking to the common moral code (like the sharing of one's wife) they reveal a people prepared to share their all with the needy even if he were a thief or a thugg.
10. The language of Gypsies in Bulgaria is very similar to the language of the hilly areas of the Punjab, and their traditional custom, folk-tunes and costumes resemble those of the hilly areas of the Punjab, now called Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir.
11. "They called them *Palikas*, i.e. 'excluded', and *Vratyas* or heretics. Their women, said they, wandered through the streets and fields adorned with garlands, intoxicated and undraped. With cries like the neighing of horses, they run to the bathing places." (History of the Punjab, S.M. Latif, p. 34)
12. *Discovery of India*, p. 70
13. *Discovery of India*, p. 117.
14. Comments S. M. Latif, the noted Muslims historian of the Punjab, in his "*A History of the Punjab*" (p. 45); "The caste system is only technically bad. It may be said to be morally bad if it created hatred and abhorrence of one another. But, generally speaking, it has not that effect in India. The distinction observed by the ancient Romans between patrician and plebeian was essentially a caste distinction. The hereditary distribution of employment among the ancient Egyptians bore a close analogy to caste. Everybody in Europe, everybody in Persia and Arabia sets up his separate table. Persons of a certain standing in society ordinarily marry only among people of position equal to their own. Only the Hindus have carried their system too far, (but) cast, properly speaking, is not peculiar to India."
15. It is interesting to note that Latif finds Buddhism "distasteful to the lively and imaginative people of India" who discarded it for reasons of 'good' wholesome life (*A History of the Punjab*, p. 49).
16. For details see : Sri Ram Sharma's "*The Crescent in India*" and "*The Religious Policy of the Moghals*"; "*The History and Culture of the Indian People*", Volumes 6 and 7 (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).
17. For details See : Dr. Tara Chand's "*Influence of Islam on India*"
8. The much-esteemed Dr. Arnold Toynbee in "*A Historian's Approach to Religion*", like Gandhiji and Tagore before him, while bemoaning the transformation of the Sikhs from a peaceable community into a war like sect yet ascribes the-political success of the Sikh-Khalsa to having "fought the Moghal ascendancy with its own weapons" (*A Study of History*, Oxford, Abridgement P. 745) a precedent which, according to him, the All Union Communist Party

also employed to its advantage under Lenin. But the distinction between the Sikh ideal of war and the other empire or idea builders as stated above, have always to be taken into account if we are to do justice to their entire history and not merely lean upon casual or ill-assorted episodes to read in it meaning not intended by its makers.

19. Banda was disowned by the Sikhs, by and large, for his assuming the airs of a Guru and flouting several other commandments of the tenth Master in the midst of a life-and-death struggle (though some recent historians, like Dr. Ganda Singh do not corroborate this thesis). So was Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh empire in the entire North West in India, censored publicly for laxity of private morals, by then custodian of the Akal Takht, Akali Phoola Singh, who as a general, also fought victoriously in many of Ranjit Singh's fiercest battles and even laid down his life in one of them.
20. It would come as a surprise to many that to date the most sensitively (not irrationally) religious minded class among the Sikhs is the one engaged in the armed services (to which the Sikhs, in spite of their being two per cent in the population of India, contribute about thirty per cent). Those engaged on the farmland and civil occupations are formal, by and large in their allegiance to the faith, but in the army, it is the mystical and the universal, the ideal of detached service and total surrender to the ideal that is looked for in religion, not the dogmatic exclusiveness, nor the misuse of religion to gain riches or personal power. This alone accounts for their exemplary discipline and detachment in the midst of both victory and defeat.
21. However, this point should not be laboured too much, as it is more an aberration on the life-current of the Sikhs than a permanent feature of their life. True that even after the demise of the tenth and the last Guru, Gobind Singh (1708 A.D.), the community for a time took its inspiration, freed the Gurdwaras, when they were fighting their life and death battle, as under Banda Singh (1710-1716 A.D.), and during the Misal period immediately there after (upto 1800 A.D. the year of Ranjit Singh's rise to power). The latter after acquiring his kingdom, however, very wisely separated the church from politics (which is not the same as separating religion from politics and instead of the Gurmattas (edicts) being issued from the holy Akal Takhat, at Amritsar, a cabinet decision was instituted by him instead, and accepted without demur by the Sikhs at large. Moreover, the Sikhs have never, except during the periods of stress accorded to their historic places a superstitious sanctity which would make totems of them. An arid desert-place, now called Damdama Sahib, was blessed by the tenth Guru as Guru's Kashi (the holiest of Hindu pilgrim stations).

The wars of the Cross that figured in history for the possession of Jerusalem by the Muslims and the Christians alike have never been thought of for Nankana Sahib, the birth-place of the founder of Sikhism, which is now in the territorial and political jurisdiction of Pakistan, though managed nominally by the Sikhs, while several other historical shrines have been allowed to decay or to remain closed both in India and Pakistan.

22. The Kookas for the Namdhari Sikhs under Baba Ram Singh their pious founder, have laid exaggerated claims for being the initiators of the freedom movement in the country. True that Baba Ram Singh, once a soldier in the Sikh army,

became the spearhead of a movement of spiritual regeneration among the Sikhs after their defeat and loss of empire in 1847 at the hands of the British. It is also a fact of history that under the inspiration of the revered Baba, his followers refused to have any truck with the English education and the British founded institutions including the law courts, the railway trains and the Post Office, etc. They even boycotted the tap-water being allegedly polluted with the animal skin which allegedly lined the metal tubes. The Namdharis also wore the home-spun cloth long before Gandhiji initiated the movement of *Swadeshi*. Forty-six Kookas were blown from the mouth of the canon at Malerkotla and Baba Ram Singh himself was deported to Rangoon where he died in incarceration. But his deportation and arrest or the martyrdom of the 46 Kookas were concerned primarily with the murder of few Muslim butchers, and not with the freedom movement by any chance. Baba Ram Singh's preference for the rosary as against the sword, his emphasis on vegetarianism, his revival of various Hindu rituals and customs, like *havan* and *Yajnas*, etc., and his followers' strict observance of an exclusive kitchen for their own sect, as in the case of the brahmins, were repugnant equally to the doctrines of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. The boycott of English education and such useful institutions as the law-courts, the post office, the railway train and tap water made the Kookas a revivalist rather than progressive movement, even though later the Kookas as under Gandhiji's leadership suffered much, along with other Sikhs, for the cause of the country's freedom. The Kookas deposed son of Ranjit Singh, to regain his throne because he had allegedly "eaten the cow" (even though by then he had entered the Sikh fold after the initiation) also reveals the revivalist nature of the Kooka movement.

THOUGHT ON FORMS AND SYMBOLS IN SIKHISM

SHER SINGH GYANI

PH.D.

The present write-up contains the views of some of the learned Sikhs on the question of Forms and Symbols in Sikhism. It begins with a letter from a friend of mine who is at present studying at the Iowa University in the United States of America. A Punjabi translation of this letter was published in the *Akali Te Pardesi* of the 20th October 1926 and a public discussion on the question was invited. I had also sent copies of the original letter to some prominent Sikhs, most of whom were kind enough to send their views.

My friend in America belongs to a devout Sikh family and he himself is an ardent lover of Sikhism. He is sincere and frank in his doubts and has no evil motive behind them. He himself says, "My object is not a mere discussion and criticism, but a pure effort to find out the truth about them : Sikh forms and symbols." He concludes by saying, "I am not discouraged by the hardships I have to face; the obstacles even strengthen my determination."

For full one year we wrote to each other and I tried to satisfy him in my own way. At last we sought the help of Professor Teja Singh, the well-known Sikh theologian, who was kind enough to refer to his article in the *Durbar* and his translations of *Asa di Var* and also to write a separate letter for my friend. These were sent to the friend in question who to my surprise wrote that they had a negative effect upon him. "The article," he says, "explains its objects nicely in a general way, but it did not remove the *suspensions* that I had."

I find that it is not my friend alone who is in such trouble but nearly all Sikh young men studying abroad think in the same way and have similar difficulties to face. The main difficulty for our young men in keeping hair, etc., I think, lies in the matter of their free social intercourse with the Western people, who are ignorant of Sikh principles and as there exists no literature to remove their ignorance, they think us a people of antiquated ideas, with no tinge of modern civilization. Here at home too I find that most of the English educated Sikh young men begin to doubt the necessity and utility of forms and symbols in Sikhism. This in my opinion is mostly due to a lack of efficient Sikh missionary work and a want of scientific and well thought out works on Sikh religion, its history, theology and literature. We have had neither time,

nor ability to do this great task. Hitherto our importance has chiefly lain in our being good soldiers. We ought to be proud of this quality and should try to progress towards its completeness. Even our Akali movement has proved the same thing; but the pity is that we are proving nothing more. All this is due to a lack of standard Sikh literature and a wrong conception of some of the main principles of Sikhism. The propaganda as carried on in the days of the Gurus stopped after the tenth Guru or a little later. In the days of the Sikh Rule it was stripped of its sanctity, simplicity and earnestness and degenerated into worldliness and ambition.

When Sikh supremacy was over, a kind of reaction had set in, and affected the vital religious impulse of the Sikhs. Sikh religion which was at its full swing (in the census figures and not in the real spirit of Sikhism) under the state-influence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh naturally declined when that influence was withdrawn. After some years the Singh Sabha started the religious propaganda which along with many other causes resulted in the Gurdwara Reform or the Akali movement. We were first fast asleep, then we took some time in waking and no sooner were we fully awake than we found ourselves in the battlefield. This shows how helpless we have been in paying any serious attention to the spread of the real mission of the Great Gurus. The battle is apparently over but we have yet a lot to do. The main body of the Sikhs : The S.G. P.C. is in financial stringencies and can pay no prompt attention to this work. Anyhow the S.G. P.C. is not to be a mere P.C., *i.e.*, an administrative body, but their Gurdwara Administration is to serve as a means to some further useful end. What we need at present is not missionary propaganda among our village Sikhs so much as among the educated young Sikhs. The missionary should make it known throughout the world, who we are and what we are? If we succeed in that the difficulties of our Sikh young men will automatically be removed.

I must now turn to the subject in hand. These letters have done a great service to our cause in bringing forth the frank and sincere views of their writers and now it is our duty to search out the truth. Some of my friends advised me not to publish these views. They said that thus the principle of Sikh forms and symbols would be made a controversial point. I do believe that the accompanying answers will neither satisfy my friend, nor will they solve the problem in a general way. On the other hand some people may again rise to answer the very answers contained in this article. But my tiny efforts will bear fruit when thus stimulated the Sikhs will begin seriously to study Sikh religion, theology and other ancient Sikh literature, will search out new truths, will write new books and will undertake to propagate the Guru's mission throughout the world.

I must now thank the gentlemen who responded to my appeal and found time in their busy life to answer my friend's letter. I also thank my Professor L. Ishwar Chandra Nanda, M.A., for his various suggestions and corrections

In the compiling of this article. But my thanks are also due to my worthy teacher and Professor Mr. Madan Gopal Singh, M.A., for his careful review of the proof-sheets of this paper.

I am really sorry to miss the views of Bhai Bir Singh Amritsar, and Gyani Sher Singh. I do not know why they have hesitated to give their definite views.

SHER SINGH GYANI,
Government College,
Lahore.
20th February 1927.

ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤੇਹ ॥

My American Friend's letter ran as follows :

Dear Gayani Ji,

Received your kind note last week accompanied by Professor Teja Singh's instructive letter, and the Khalsa College Magazine. I am sorry I could not answer promptly because I was too busy. I thank you for your efforts to convince me about the necessity of Forms and Symbols in Sikhism, though they had a negative effect on me. This may not sound good to you; but if I tell you just the opposite only to please you, that will be harmful to me and a deceit to your efforts. However, you should not misunderstand me in my asking questions about Sikh Religious Symbols. My object is not a mere discussion or criticism, but a pure effort to find out the truth about them. If my object had been only to get rid of my hair I could very easily have done that without troubling anybody; as a majority of the Sikhs here do. To them it seems to be the easiest way, but it is a dirty trick. It is not only deceiving the parents or one's ownself but a great blow on the Sikh Religion. They are misunderstood as Christian converts. Before doing that, if all of them get together and sincerely approach the Panth, the Panth would be obliged to mitigate their suffering or deny the truth. This might seem a foolish proposal, but it is not so. I am not trying to manufacture anything but they are my real inward feelings. I have met and heard from a great many of the Sikhs in America and Europe. Everybody has the same troubles, but no body comes to discuss the matter with anybody at home. They say, "People at home, who are conducting their Sikh principles in comfortable circumstances, will not try to understand us, but will take our criticism in an opposite way; because they do not know the conditions here, and instead of encouragement and relief they will try to make light of our difficulties". This seems to be quite true. Those who send back their complaints and diverse convictions are considered to be weak minded, effected by the ideas of Christianity, or rogues who want to enjoy beautiful girls after cutting off their hair. At any rate, all those who cut off the hair and go back in the same condition are supposed to be Christian

converts, although they may be as far away from Christianity, as any other Sikh and even in some cases be better Sikhs in spirit than the average so called Sikhs.

I have a very short extra time at my disposal, so I will not be able to write to Professor Teja Singh very soon if at all. I have read his article, his letter, and your letter very carefully. I find those things explained that don't need any explanation. I think I could have understood better if Professor Sahib had only answered to my questions that I had asked in my letter. The article explains its object nicely in a general way, but it did not remove the suspicions that I had. You have said in your letter that the article was most convincing. It would have been exactly so to me if had been at home. I will explain briefly how the article effects me. To me it is quite clear that Sikh Forms and Symbols are just the same as there are forms in other organizations. They are not essential for every Sikh in all circumstances. They are for the betterment of the Sikh Panth, but if they show any disadvantages, there is no harm in amending them. You will think that this is an opposite effect than the writer had designed the article for. In this article, Professor Sahib cites the examples of caste-System, Cooking Squares, and Sacred Threads, "which," he says, "were originally designed for some definite good purpose, but by the times of Sri Guru Nanak Dev they had become so old and corrupt that he asked the Hindus to renounce them." Our Forms had the same kind of origin as the above-mentioned forms. Then, is there any guarantee against our Symbols and Forms getting so old that they will not remain fit for the purpose they were designed? (Forms and Symbols are determined for the pure necessity of organization which is a part of the religion. These forms have at least no defects if they don't have much more advantages to make the followers more efficient in performing their mission. But when these forms don't serve that purpose, they are no better than mere local or racial symbols that must be abandoned to avoid division and exclusiveness).

In America the idea of letting the hair grow as they naturally do seems to be more unreasonable and gewgaw sort than the idea of 'Eating in Squares' was in the days of Guru Nanak. It seem no better than a racial and local differences and it certainly is a blockade against social intercourse. It is thought by the people to be as primitive as the days when human beings roamed naked in the jungles. To the people around it is a sign of ignorance. (You will answer that we should behave better so that people should know our ability, but that is not the point I am deriving at). Why should Sikhs abroad wait for Guru Nanak to come again and help? Why should they not save him that trouble? Same is the case with Iron ring. No body searches for our sternness (for which it is meant), but the show of iron ring effects him the way we are effected when we see ਤਵੀਤ, ਟੂਣਾ, Jogi's ear rings or the idols.

I perfectly understood that religion is not only an individual concern, but it is an organization of individuals of the same ideas who try to search

after truth in one way. As human nature has sentiments, emotions, and imaginations so these organizations adopt some forms to assure the continuity of extension. These forms are not bondage to individuals but pleasure and pride. They are not dead but a living index of his ideas. Those who do not adopt these forms cannot be the part of the organization because those who cry against all forms cannot be of any good to anybody. I know how our forms and symbols originated, how nicely they have marked so far. But I think they need some reformation now. I feel guilty to say that, and I do not know what you will think of me, but I cannot help to say that. I think that we cannot follow some ideals freely and still firmly if we do not know exactly what they are, and if we cannot discuss and reform them when we find fault with them. An ignorant fellow like me has nothing to say in such important matters, but he will never come out of ignorance if he thinks that he has no say in connection therewith. Professor Sahib says that our forms are just the same type as the forms in Military and Salvation Army. I certainly agree to that, and I am proud that Sikh Panth will always keep some forms. In Military the forms are for some definite purpose, and they are so designed that the soldiers in them can be most efficient. Nobody in those forms can be handicapped in the purpose for which they are designed. These forms are changed from time to time with the change of the environments. The invention of gun-powder cut out the brilliant and shiny uniforms of the soldiers and replaced the sword by rifle and pistol. If some armies now get the idea of keeping the same forms as red jackets, an axe, a sword and a shield, they will certainly have a hard time. The question of our sword is exactly the same. A soldier on leave is as good, as a soldier on duty. Living out of forms for a short time does not affect him any way.

Panth has as much power as Gurus had, why can it not make changes when it deems necessary? If the Christians had not reformed their old testament, there would have been very few Christians by this time. The only thing that restricts Sikhism from spreading is the strictness of Forms. No body here will grow hair even if he believes in every bit of Sikh philosophy.* All the Gurus had been making changes in Sikh religion in their lifetime why should the Panth be deprived of this right? If the Panth does not find any need for change it can make some allowances for those who go in different circumstances. We find the same kind of example in Sikh history. Some Sikhs were sent to Benaras by Guru Gobind Singh to study Hindu Theology but they were not required to be in the same form as the other Sikhs.

When the forms are not quite indispensable why should the Sikh students suffer? If the Panth deems them necessary in Homeland at present, they can be adopted again just the same when the students retire back. Why an educated

*This contention has been proved wrong by Harbhajan Singh Yogi through whose inspiration many European and American people turned towards Sikhism have been maintaining their hair intact.

man get handicapped for mere forms. A soldier in trench should not have the same uniform and equipment as the one in aeroplane.

I have not been able to express myself clearly; please try to get that I mean and don't catch me on words, when you answer, please don't try to manufacture reasons to cut out my petty disbeliefs (we can find reasons for and against every subject that we happen to discuss) but try to think the way I do, and then find some relief for me. If you will give some reasons only for the sake of discussion, they will do me harm instead of any good. Please refer to my previous letters and see what I am driving at. I think that you know all the difficulties that Sikh students have to face, so I don't feel need to explain them. I am not discouraged by the hardships I have to face, the obstacles even strengthen my determination, but why I should show my sternness and get handicapped if it is not absolutely necessary.*

By Hon'able S. Jogindra Singh, Minister for Agriculture to the Punjab Government.

26, DAVIS ROAD, THE PARK, LAHORE,
28th October 1926.

Dear Sir,

I have read the letter of your friend with very great interest and I am greatly struck by his sincerity of purpose and breadth of outlook. I am afraid I am not competent to express any views on the subject, for to me all forms are means to an end and that end is to live as the Gurus have told us to live. I sympathise with the views of your friend regarding changing with the changing times and my view is that the Gurus have provided for the change. In the meanwhile, I feel that when you belong to a society or a club, you have to observe its rules, till these rules are changed.

Yours sincerely,
JOGINDRA SINGH.

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥
By Sardar Jodh Singh, M.A.

Khalsa College,
30-12-26.

My dear Gyani Sher Singh,

Before attempting to give a reply I should like to state the position clearly and briefly. The central idea in Sikh religion is the destruction of 'ਰਹਿਮ' and thus knowing 'ਰਜਾ' which would become the guide of our life. This could be achieved by perfect obedience to the Guru, association with Sadh Sangat and repetition of Name. A person as he comes to the Guru is not baptised at once. He becomes an *amritdhari* only when he is able to fulfil

*The Benares example cited by my friend on page 42 has no historical support. —Sher Singh.

certain vows which he takes at the time of baptism. It is then that along with other vows he is asked to keep his hair uncut and wear the other *Kakkas*. If, after that he shaves his hair, he is called *patit*, but if he omits to wear any of the other 4 *Kakka's* he is merely *tankhaia*. There is thus a fundamental difference between the wearing of *Keshas* and the remaining four *Kakkas*.

The whole difficulty arises from the fact that people are given *amrit* before they are fit to receive it. Your friend appears to think that it is easier to be a Sikh in spirit than to keep the Sikh form of wearing the hair uncut. To me it appears, on the other hand, that keeping one's hair uncut is easier than following the spirit of Sikhism in our every day life. Will one who really believes "that whatever He does is for the best" for a moment think that he could improve the human form designed by the Maker by cutting off a living portion of it viz. the hair. Keeping the hair uncut to me is the natural and outer manifestation of that spirit of "ਰਾਜੀ ਬਰ ਰਜਾ" that is working within. It is not a form that is super imposed but it is a form that grows from the seed that is sown within. I know of at least one great European thinker, Tolstoy by name, who says that highest religion yet discovered by man is submission to His Will and strange to say that this great thinker and writer left cutting his hair and beard. This is the meaning that I attach to keeping the hair uncut.

As for your friend's other contentions I don't want to discuss them in detail. The Panth has no right to order a change in the fundamental principles, nor is Panth the Guru in the sense in which your friend takes it. A true Sikh's first concern is obedience to the Guru. By that the object of this life is fulfilled. Learning and wealth are not the objects he hankers after. "ਨਾਨਕ ਲੇਖੈ ਟਿਕ ਗਲ ਹੋਰ ਹਉਮੈ ਝਖਣਾ ਝਖ"'

He could sacrifice every thing for the sake of the Guru. But that could be done only when one has realised the value of Guru's Word. Ordinary men like myself deny him a thousand times every day to live our life of 'ਹਉਮੈ' and in spite of a show of great learning and a heap of material comforts go empty-handed from this world.

Yours sincerely,
JODH SINGH.

By Professor Teja Singh, M.A.

From the Tract No. 70 of The Sikh Tract Society, Lahore.

FORMS AND SYMBOLS.

The principle of organization is a part of the Sikh religion. A Sikh is not only to look to his individual character but is also to shoulder his responsibilities as a part of the corporate body of the Panth. This is evident from the form of congregational worship and the daily Prayer of Sikhs, wherein the Sikh invokes after God all the ten Gurus and the deeds of those great Sikhs who have suffered for the Panth and brings before his mind the present

organic life of the community, with its different associations and meeting-places scattered everywhere, thus steeping himself every day in the association of those who constitute the past and present history of the Panth. This institution entails certain additional disciplinary outfit in the shape of baptismal forms and vows which are often misunderstood. People cannot easily understand how it is that, while in *Asa-di-Var* the Guru ridicules certain forms and symbols, the Sikh religion has yet got its own which it considers as a regular part of its constitution.

It is true that if religion were only a matter of individual concern, there would be no need of forms or symbols. But religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennobles individuals but binds them together to work for nobility in the world. Organization is a means of enlarging the possibility, scope, and effectiveness of this work. In order that an organization may itself work effectively, it is necessary that the individuals concerned in it should be able to keep up their attachment to the cause and a sufficient amount of enthusiasm for it. It is, however, a patent fact that men by their nature are so constituted that they cannot keep their feelings equally highstrung for a long time at a stretch. Reaction is inevitable, unless some means are devised to ensure the continuity of exertion. This is where discipline comes in, which keeps up the spirit of individuals against relaxation in times of trial and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in moments of ebb. This discipline, or what is called *esprit de corps*, is secured by such devices as flags and drills and uniforms in armies and certain forms and ceremonies in religion. Uniformity is an essential part of them. They create the necessary enthusiasm by appealing to imagination and sentiment, and work for it in moments of depression. They are a real aid to religion, which is essentially a thing of sentiment. Man would not need them if he were only a bundle of intellectual and moral sense; but as he has also sentiment and imagination without which the former qualities would be inoperative, he cannot do without articulating his ideas and beliefs in some forms appropriate to sentiment. These forms must not be dead but a living index of his ideal, waking up in him vivid intimations of the personality that governs his religion. They should be related to his inner belief as words are to their meaning, tears to grief, smiles to happiness, and a tune to a song. It is true that sometimes words become meaningless, when we no longer heed their sense, or the language to which they belong becomes dead. It is true that sometimes tears and smiles are only cloaks for hypocrisy, and a tune mere meaningless jingle. But there is no denying the fact that, when their inner meaning is real and we are sincere about it, they do serve as very helpful interpreters. Forms are the art of religion. Like art on nature, these forms impose certain limitations on the ideal, but at the same time they make the ideal more real and workable for general use.

Sometimes, however, when the forms are determined, not by necessity of uniformity which is so essential to discipline, but by the local or racial

causes, they narrow the applicability of the ideal, create division and exclusiveness where they should have helped men to unite. When the spirit in which they had been originally conceived dies out, they become mere handicaps to religion, and the people who use them would be well advised to abandon them. A telescope certainly helps the sight in looking at things far in the heavens, but when its lens becomes so defective that instead of helping the naked eye it proves an actual hinderance in its way, then the telescope must be put aside. It was such forms that Guru Nanak asked the Hindus to leave. The custom of taking food within cooking squares must have begun in the desire to eat in clean places, which is very desirable. But by the time of the Guru it had become merely a sign of exclusiveness and had no reference to cleanliness. Similarly the caste system must have grown as an economical practice of different peoples to carry on their avocations differently, but it became condemnable when it tied down certain people to a degraded position, simply because their forefathers had been once forced to submit to it. The sacred thread was also a like symbol of exclusiveness. It was of a different sort for different high castes, and the lower castes, had to go without it, as also without the privileges attached to it. Such forms were only searing the spirit of religion in India, and alienating the people from God. It was right, therefore, that the Guru should advise the people to 'destroy that custom which made them forget God' ‡ and set up barriers between man and man.

But the Sikh forms were not conceived in a spirit of exclusiveness, or as essential to the spiritual advancement of individual soul. They were simply appointed to serve as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community, and any man who likes to serve humanity through the Sikh Panth can wear them. It is possible for a man to love God and cultivate his individual soul without adopting these forms; but if he wants to work in a systematic manner not only for his own advancement but for the good of others as well in the company of Sikhs, he must adopt these disciplinary forms of their organization. It is possible for a single wrestler to acquire bodily strength equal to that of four soldiers in uniform, but this cannot be used as an argument against the formation of armies and the use among them of uniforms and other such things for the promotion of joint action. If the same wrestler were to make a band of stout men like himself for some set purpose, he would see that certain forms and signs, which he had originally worn as his simple requirements, would soon, begin to appear on his followers too, who would adopt them, not as useless gewgaws, but as useful helpers in maintaining their *esprit de corps* and a pride in the work associated with their prototype. Similarly the Sikhs, who are the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh and whose religion is surcharged with his personality, find the uniform worn and ordained by him as a real help in playing their part as units of the Panthic organization.

‡ *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 590.

This help comes from the appeal made to sentiment by the process of association and not through any inherent efficacy of the forms themselves. This association is not with places or things, but with an ever-living personality that itself is a symbol of the Highest Personality. As is God, so is the Guru; and as is the Guru so must be the follower. Wearing a *kachhahira* ensuring briskness of movement at times of action and serving as an easy under-wear at times of rest, an iron ring on his right arm as a sign of sternness and constraint, and a sword by his side as an instrument of offence, and defence and as an emblem of power and dignity, the Guru presented an impressive picture of a simple but disciplined soldier (who never retires in his life, ~~time~~—Editor). He, however, combined in him the saintliness of the old Rishis with the sternness and strength of a knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept long hair, which all the world over have always been associated with Saintliness. A comb was a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These were the forms with which the Sikhs were invested at the time of their baptism, in order to look exactly like their Master, as they were to behave exactly like him.

From the history of the Sikhs in the past as well as in the present, it is quite evident how effectively these baptismal forms, with the accompanying vows, have aided them in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of the greatest trial. While keeping the Sikhs associated with their Guru and maintaining his spirit among them, they have not produced any narrowing effect on their beliefs and modes of worship. Rather, as history tells us, changes for the worse have always synchronised with the want of insistence on the baptismal vows. This was in the days of the Sikh rule, when luxury and power tempted our people to consider the vows too hard for them. They lost their identity as Sikhs and became as superstitious about God and His worship as they had been before the time of the Gurus. With the modern revival the Sikhs have found themselves again; and with the old faith in the efficacy of the baptismal vows they still believe that God is one and that their is no worship more pleasing to Him than the heartfelt singing of His hymns. All worship and ceremony, whether in temple or home, whether on birth, marriage or death, consists of nothing else but praying and chanting hymns. Could anything be simpler?

Some people, while admitting the necessity of some forms in religion do not approve of the particular forms in vogue and want the Panth to do away with them or invent some new ones in their place, which may be more suitable to the modern conditions of society. This is a mere caprice, imported from the secular spheres of life, of ever-changing fashions. They ignore the universal fact that in religion whatever has once been accepted as an integral part of its constitution cannot be changed or dispensed with without changing

or dispensing with the religion itself. This difference between social fashions and religious forms is due to the fundamental differences between the natures of their origin. The fashions originate with different generations each of which has got an equal authority with others; therefore no one generation can bind another in the observance of a particular fashion. Each generation is competent enough to invent its own mode of dress or behaviour. But in religion all obligations originate from its Founder whose authority cannot be set aside except by himself or by a successor wielding equal authority with him. In Sikhism any one of the Ten Gurus, being equal with the others, was fully qualified to change or modify any rule set down by his predecessors; but after the Tenth Guru, the supreme authority was divided and came to rest with the Panth and the collective Teaching of the Gurus. The Panth is Guru only in conjunction with the Teaching, and cannot be said to be the sole arbiter of its destiny. No generation of Sikhs, therefore is competent enough to supersede the authority of the Word or any genuine dictum handed down by the Gurus.

Then is there no possibility of reform in religion? Yes, there is. You can reform the doctrines and the practices obtaining at a particular time by removing the unauthorised accretions which have gathered round the original core through the ignorance of the followers, but in each case you will have to show that you are not removing anything original, but only the unnecessary additions made by others without the Founder's consent. The Sikhs, in the course of their recent reforms, have done away with such observations as the *shradhs*, *sutak*, *janēu*, etc., because they were able to show by referring to the original sources that these were unauthorised accretions and that Sikhism had nothing to do with them. But they cannot similarly reform away the Holy Granth, or make any additions to it from the writings of the modern saints and holy men, although by so doing they may be apparently, following the example of the Gurus in making the Book more comprehensive and up-to-date. Similarly they cannot add a new Guru to the list of the original Ten, nor withdraw their allegiance from any one of them. The position of the Sikh baptism and the baptismal forms is also equally uncompromising.

All the care that was needful was taken by the Gurus in order not to encumber their religion with unnecessary forms, but the few ones they did find necessary to incorporate in the scheme of their religion are an essential part of the Sikhs' religious outfit, and they can in no case dispense with them without going out of the pale of Sikhism. You may say they are not as important as the belief in one God and other spiritual doctrines. But important they are; and their importance, as shown above, lies in the help they give in the maintenance of the Panthic organization, which is an essential part of Sikhism.

By Bawa Harkishan Singh; M.A.,
Principal, G.N. College, Gujranwala.

To my mind the letter of our friend from America raises two distinct

questions; the disadvantages and difficulties that Sikh students face abroad, and the question of the justification of Keshas in general. These two need not be mixed up. At the same time we should remember that disadvantages and difficulties exist for the Sikhs even at home, though in a smaller degree, and that doubts about the justification of Keshas are sometimes voiced here as well. Honest doubt commands respect, while expression of doubt, intended as a convenient transition for leaving the fold, is nothing worthy and cannot be argued away.

So far as the difficulties of sincere, believing youngmen abroad are concerned, they will be lessened as the status of India and the Indians abroad improves. It is also necessary to provide a social environment for Sikh youngmen, where they may remain in touch with their own traditions and replenish their enthusiasm for Sikhism. A Students' Home, a Gurdwara, or a Social Club—which will be the best instrument, that depends upon the conditions obtaining in difference places.

As for the general question of the justification of Keshas, my humble study and reflection has led me to the conclusion that our Master, Siri Guru Gobind Singh has, in His wisdom laid down certain simple rules of conduct for our guidance and we should obey those rules. They are useful, they are reasonable, but that is not the primary reason for my accepting them. I accept them primarily because it is His bidding. Sikhism does not claim to be founded on the "dry light of reason" alone; emotion and sentiment are real potent factors in Sikhism. Reason is not discarded, rather, our aim is disciplined emotion and enlightened sentiment. The moral quality of the Guru's teachings brings conviction to my reason, and I accept Him as my master with confidence and faith. Therefore, in such matters as the Keshas, I do not feel any questioning. I do not approve of the practice of certain simple minded people of arguing about the ordinary utility and the medical properties of Keshas. Do they mean to say that if it were proved that the Keshas confer no advantages, then the Sikhs would give them up? The Keshas are a help to organisation, but that is, again, not the primary reason for our wearing them.

I am deliberately of opinion that the real reason for our wearing the Keshas is attachment to the personality and ideals of Guru Gobind Singh. What is necessary is not a campaign for propagating the uses and advantages of Keshas, but an effort to reinforce the love for the Guru in the hearts of Sikh youths. When the sap dries, the leaves and the branches droop.

To sincere believing youngmen, whether here or abroad, who are troubled by honest doubt, I would humbly suggest, "Get nearer the Guru's radiant and energising personality through Gurbani, through reflection, and through prayer, for that is how doubt is best dispelled."

Doubts about Keshas and similar subject are a sign. We should take heed and ask ourselves the question : "Is not the trouble deeper? Are we not drifting away from our Master?" More often than not the trouble is deeper.

Attend to the root, the leaves and the branches will take care of themselves.

As for the value of Keshas and other Sikh symbols, as helps to organisation I would refer you to the excellent article of Prof. Teja Singh recently published by the Sikh Tract Society, Lahore.* I have not entered into this aspect of the question here, for I do not believe that, that is the basic reason of our wearing the Keshas. We should boldly and honestly take our stand on the fundamental attachment to the personality of Guru Gobind Singh.**

By

Prof. Gurmukh Nihal Singh, Benares. [Banaras]

The question about the sanctity of the Sikh symbols is gradually forcing itself on the attention of the thinking people in the community, though the Sikh masses are yet in no mood to entertain it. They regard their symbols as sacrosanct and any one who dares to question their sanctity is at once dubbed as a heretic. It is impossible for them to believe that the person who discards the symbols can still retain any love or respect for the Gurus or faith in the Sikh tenets. Every now and again they are shocked to hear that a young man has given up keeping long hair. They work themselves into a furious rage over the event but do nothing to probe into the causes of such action. As a matter of fact this attitude of the Sikh masses makes it impossible to discuss the question frankly or thoroughly and yet it is obvious that the whole future of the Sikh community and the progress and spread of Sikhism are indissolubly bound up with it. I request all those who are interested in the advancement of the Sikhs to give up the alarmist and unthinking attitude on this question of the symbols and ponder deeply over it to discover a satisfactory solution.

Symbols have played and still continue to play a great and important part in Indian life. The best Indian Art is symbolic and millions of Indians worship God through the use of symbols—some of which are exceedingly crude and ugly. The use of symbols is necessary to carry abstract ideas to backward and ignorant people. Even the language and script of a primitive people are symbolic and pictorial as in the case of the Chinese. The greatest difficulty with symbols is that with use they cease to be mere symbols; they become identified with the objects for which they stand. The idol instead of representing God becomes God itself.

It has been pointed out that our symbols are not religious and do not take us away from God. As far as the worship of God is concerned it is pure and unadulterated. Our God is a formless one. He is Nirankar. Our symbols

* The reference is to the preceding article. E.

** I hope Bawajee's answer will satisfy many young men entertaining sincere doubts. Some may call it sentimental view, but they should also know that Religion is not mere intellectual reasoning.—
Sher Singh

are badges : they are like soldiers uniform which mark off the initiated disciples of Guru Gobind Singh from those of the followers of other saints; and that the symbols of a Sikh remind him of the duties he owes to God, Panth, and man as does the uniform remind the wearer of his obligations to the King, Army and the country. Analogy is a dangerous method in the hands of the uninitiated. It must always be remembered that analogy is not proof : similarity does not necessarily imply identity. Uniform is something that is temporary—it gets soiled and dirty. It can be changed and taken off temporarily or permanently. Surely Sikh symbols are not of this kind. And, moreover, Sikh symbols are after all not so unique as some of us imagine them to be. In the south of India there are many brahmins who keep a huge *choti* and some do not shave the hair of the head at all. I know of some Hindus who consider it as incumbent on them to keep long hair as do the Sikhs. And it is not very long ago that the Hindus used to be identified by their *choti* and the Muslims by their long beard, as we are still identified by our long hair; Hindus of one sect are often distinguished from those of another sect by the nature and form of the caste mark on the forehead. The Hindus of the three higher castes are differentiated from the *Shudras* by the wearing of the sacred thread. It is not necessary to multiply instances, they are given in abundance in our sacred scriptures.

There are some ingenious persons among us who, like the scholastics of the Middle Ages have used their learning to invent curious arguments to justify the keeping of long hair. Some have tried to justify them on scientific grounds, as a protection against the sun and electric shocks, etc. I know very little science, but my scientific friends tell me that keeping head tied up as we Sikhs do without any arrangement for ventilation is not only unscientific but positively injurious. And it is only habit that makes us put up with long hair and turban during the summer months. Some have requisitioned the services of history to demonstrate the necessity of keeping long hair as if anything that existed in the past was necessarily good ! There are some who point to pictures of the 16th, 17th, 18th century Englishmen to prove the advantages of keeping long hair little knowing that the hair seen in the pictures are not hair at all but wigs that were used by fashionable men in England during those days. And there are persons, educated men among us, who have discovered the most convincing proof in the story of Sampson (Samson) and Delilah as given in the Bible. Such arguments instead of helping us make us look ridiculous in the eyes of intelligent men.

Let us admit once for all that utility is the only test in cases of this kind. As long as symbols continue to serve a useful purpose in the life of the community, as long as they do not degenerate into mere form but are instinct with meaning and life, as long as they are kept alive and do not act as a drag on the onward march of the community, so long they have a right to exist; other-wise the sooner they are discarded the better, it is for the well being of

the community. And the leaders have to keep a constant vigil to see that the symbols do not become a dead weight and are not in any way injurious to the development of the community.

The services that our symbols have rendered to us are unique. *Kesh* and *Kirpan* espacially have been a God-send to us. Without them we could not have lived through the terrible times through which we have passed even since our birth. If we have escaped strangulation, if we have not become submerged in the vast ocean of Hinduism, if we still retain our individuality and identity, if we have still a spark of life in us, it is due to no small extent to the existence of these two symbols amidst us. The obligation to keep long hair made it impossible for weak-minded, comfort loving person to accept Sikhism and it made those who had already become Sikhs braver and hardier than before. If we had given up wearing long hair during the terrible times that followed the death of Guru Gobind Singh and had taken shelter in Hindu homes to escape Muslim persecution we would have soon forgotten the sublime teachings of the Gurus and would have drifted back to the superstitious practices from which the Gurus had extricated us. We were saved—those who were brave enough not to succumb to the temptation of a quiet life of comfort—from this tragedy by our long hair. The obligation to keep long hair took us away to the jungles; our *Kirpans* helped us to protect ourselves. The jungles of the Punjab became the home of the persecuted brave Sikhs and there they lived ideal Sikh lives which have proved a constant source of inspiration to those who have come after them. That is why *Kesh* became so dear to the Sikhs; that is why men like Bhai Taru Singh preferred to suffer the tortures and allowed their bodies to be mangled and minced rather than to part with their long hair. He would be a foolish man indeed who would counsel the community to lightly discard the *Kesh* when they have been of much tremendous service to the community. Sikhism lived through its symbols during the period of Mughal persecution and it is these symbols that have kept us united and have given us a *esprit de corps* which is the envy of the members of other communities in India.

Our symbols indeed have been of tremendous service to us and it is hardly possible to exaggerate their past utility. Our long hair have preserved our identity; Our *Kirpan* has maintained our life, property, and honour; Our *Kara* (steel bracelet) has taught us the value of upright, self controlled, stern, disciplined life; our *Kutchh* (*kachhahira*) has provided us with a convenient dress in summer and at night and with good underwear in winter; and the *Kangha* has supplied the necessary instrument for keeping the hair clean and tidy. And they have all kept constantly before our eyes the saintly figure of Our Saviour and Preceptor, Guru Gobind Singh and those of his inspired Sikhs, and have knit us together as nothing else would have done.

To what extent are these symbols of ours living today? Are they still instinct with meaning and life? Or have they become a dead weight retarding

our progress? These are questions that deserve careful consideration at the hands of all well-wishers of the Panth.

The attitude of the masses towards the symbols is that of unquestioning reverence and of unthinking acquiescence. Many keep them as a matter of form. Very few know their meaning and significance. Not one per cent of them, I am afraid, will be able to explain the purpose of wearing *Kara* on the right arm. Yet, all the same, symbols are extremely useful to them. They remind them of their splendid inheritance and make them realise their unity and common entity. Take away the *Kesh* and *Kara*, *Kutchh* and *Kirpan* and *Kangha* from the Sikh masses today and within a few years they will lose their identity and will become hybrids—with their one leg in one boat and their other in the second one—worshipping the Hindu idols and holy *Granth* at one and the same time. As long as the Sikh masses remain uneducated, as long as they are not developed enough to grasp the lofty teachings of the Gurus unaided, so long they must continue to need the symbols. It is only through symbols, through following narrowly—without swerving even by a hair's breath, in the foot-steps of the Gurus and of the Sikhs like Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Mani Singh and others, that they can learn the true way of religion and reach God.

But what about the educated classes? Do they need them in the same way and to the same extent as the uneducated masses? I know many of them are capable of understanding, appreciating and following the highest teachings of the Gurus without the use of symbols, but even they cannot afford to discard them. They should not do anything to cut themselves apart from their less educated brethren. They must remember that they have a duty to perform towards them. They owe it to the Gurus, Panth, and God to work amongst them and for their uplift. And it must not be forgotten that they can only serve them, uplift them, if they go amongst them as one of them and in the form and appearance in which they can accept them and regard them as their older brothers and leaders.

We must, however, recognise that all educated persons in the community can not be animated with such an ideal of service. It must be remembered that man is after all a selfish creature and that in every community there are persons with individualistic trend of mind. There are men amongst us who feel that they can be good *bhagats* of the Gurus without wearing the external symbols of Sikhism—in fact they go further and say that they can follow the true spirit of Gurus' teachings better than those who are obsessed with the external trappings of religion—and they quote the holy *Granth* in support of their contention. They feel that symbols make them obtrusive—they expose them to unnecessary attacks and attention—they are needlessly made the butt end of jokes—and their free movements in the modern world are greatly restricted. They even feel that their symbols stand in the way of their worldly progress. Many of my I.M.S. (Indian Military Service) friends have told me

so. I know of at least half a dozen, even more, Sikh I. M. S. officers who have felt it necessary to discard their long hair though they continue to live Sikh lives in other respects and have no faith in any other religion. The number of such men amongst us are increasing at a rapid rate. Must we continue to dub them as apostates and turn them out of our fold? Are we so rich in intellect that we can afford the loss of some of our ablest men? Can we go on looking with equanimity the phenomenon which is, I am afraid, growing common, and is bound to become even more so as time goes on (as we must be frank enough to recognise that Western learning and modern thought are disruptive of belief in the necessity and efficacy of symbols), and see many of those who acquire knowledge and reputation become in the eyes of the community apostates and outcasts. That way lies destruction. We must be wise enough to keep men of the type just mentioned in our fold and adjust our ideas—hard as it is bound to be—to the changed conditions. We must enlarge the definition of a Sikh to include such men. Any one who solemnly declares in the presence of God and the Gurus—Sri Guru Granth Sahib—that he believes in the ten Gurus and their teachings, that besides the Gurus and the Granth Sahib he does not recognise any other binding authority in religion, that he belongs to no other religion or community and that he is a Sikh and wishes to be a member of the Sikh fold should be treated as a Sikh and a member of the community.

It is necessary to modify the definition of a Sikh in some such manner as suggested above not only to keep some of our abler men in the fold but also because we owe duty to our Gurus to spread their gospel in this country and abroad. And it must be obvious to any thinking man that we cannot expect any success in our propaganda among the educated classes in India or among any people abroad if we stick rigidly to our old standard and symbols. Let us not be slaves to forms and symbols and forget our duty to the Gurus and religion. Let us remember that Guru Nanak came into the world to teach the religion of the spirit and to deliver mankind from the thralldom of *tilak* and *janeu*, *sunat* and *roza*, *tirath* and *haj*, *cross* and *crescent*, *idols* and *icons*. *

SAT SRI AKAL.

By S. Sardul Singh Caveessieur.

In answer to my letter Mr. Caveessieur referred to his tract : the Battle of Life, published in December 1919 by the Sikh Tract Society, Lahore. The portion dealing with the forms and symbols of the Sikhs is given below.

* * * * *

*From the utilitarian point of view Prof. Gurmukh Nihal Singh's opinion is the most convincing. It has suggested some really wise and practicable methods, but it lies with the Panth to decide one way or the other. Sher Singh.

The ideal man for Guru Gobind Singh was an ideal soldier,—a soldier ever engaged in battle against all that is dark, mean and unrighteous. It was to be the daily work of every such soldier to rise higher and higher by sheer force of character, and at the same time to help others in such an effort.

* * * * *

So, those who wish to play the part of soldiers must grow strong in body, must grow rich and must become men of adamant wills. They must overflow with energy of other kind—physical, mental and spiritual. Only in this way they can do their duty well. Social service, philanthropy, patriotism, religion—all these require their support; and the support can only come when the supporters are well endowed with these virtues.

Guru Gobind Singh's emblem for these active virtues was *Kirpan* or sword. Every lion-like soldier was required to have this weapon with him to stand as an outward expression of an inner virtue and to ever remind him of what his duty was. This sword, or emblem of Divine Energy as he called it, was for the reformation of evil and protection of good. Brute force guided by evil hands was to be opposed with all might; but at the same time the less gifted were to be helped onward by all active and beneficent means.

The second emblem given to his soldiers by Guru Gobind Singh was the comb of purity. Our bodies should be clean and so should be our hearts because it will be only then that a proper use could be made of the Divine Energy.

The third virtue necessary for a soldier of Guru Gobind Singh's army was Honesty. The dealings between man and man should be based on this virtue, so that no misunderstanding should ever arise. None should misappropriate what belongs to others; because this has been at the root of a greater part of human troubles. It is due to his thievish propensities in man's nature that we find so much of unrest in the world. Guru Gobind Singh put a small hand-cuff on the wrist of every one of his men to let them know that their hands were to be kept back from all such pollution.

The other virtue which these soldiers were to possess was chastity; chastity both in thought and action. Our passions should be like those of an innocent maiden, knowing nothing of evil. No unclean thought should pass our mind, and we should not think evil of any one else. Small trousers (Trousere of chastity) were to signify this virtue.

The soldier thus equipped with these arms was ready for the battle of life. Such a soldier must succeed because he is complete in every respect. He becomes a great force for the upheaval of man-kind. But this acquired greatness was not to be used for self-elevation alone, it was to be made a sacrifice unto the alter of humanity. Each soldier being member of a social group must live as much for himself as for the common brotherhood. His was a duty to sacrifice every attainment of his to the benefit of corporate life because in this lay his own greatness and his own salvation. When every one was imbued with this

spirit of sacrifice, the efforts of each should bring richer fruits for himself and for all else than is possible otherwise. This spirit has its outward mark in *keshas* or growing of long hair.

* * * * *

The inner uniform for the soul of a soldier who has to fight the battle of life consists in the cultivation of the virtues to wear the King's robes. It would not make him a King, rather he would be a disgrace to such a dress. Similarly those who wear the uniform of Guru Gobind Singh's soldiers but do not possess the virtues necessary for fighting the battle of life, are a disgrace to the uniform and no more than stage soldiers, worthless for any real purpose.*

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Bhai Sahib Bhai Kahan Singh, Nabha, has referred to his book "Sikh Kaswatti" which will soon be published by him.

* * * * *

Gyani Bisram Singh Saras of Nankana Sahib proposes the following method for the solution of this problem :

That a meeting of all the Panthik theologians be called and the matter should be deliberately discussed there. Any decision thus arrived at should be placed before the Panth for sanction.

* * * * *

Another learned Sikh** writes that writing casual letters and getting replies and publishing them can do no good. "The best way," he writes, "perhaps will be to convene a special conference or a council of the Sikhs and see if any clear path can be chalked out. It is a question of cutting a road out of arguments. Arguments are never convincing. Faith in things of vital interest is never *created*, it is always *spontaneous*." He says that it is absurd to treat the matter from the utilitarian point of view. "Religion," he goes on to say, "inner religion, *can never be social*, it is always individual's *private inmost concern* ***like his love of his friends and relatives. And, so to treat the manifest shape of the Tenth Guru as something which we can alter only shows we are no longer His disciples. Discipleship means implicit obedience. Obedience is of greater wisdom than thinking and intellectualising over the realities of life.

* * * * *

But if we are no more Sikhs we have no more that old spirit of Guru's

* I pointed out to Mr. Caveesicur that the above article could not answer my friend's doubts, nor did it deal with the present necessity and utility of forms and symbols in Sikhism. He answered that he would soon publish a separate book on that question.

Sher Singh

**I am not permitted to give out his name.

Sher Singh

***Then where lies the necessity of external forms.

Sher Singh

wothiness, the modern tendencies would uproot us from the old soil, as the blast uproots a worm-eaten tree on the road-side. And if we nestle the old spark in our bosom, our oddities of shape will be universally tolerated if not appreciated."

* * * * *

Gyani Lall Singh Editor of the *Kakkar Bahadur* and the *Panch Khalsa Samachar* Amritsar gave a very detailed answer to my friend's letter, which is published in parts in the issues of these papers which extend from the 20th of October 1926 to 25th of December 1926.

Bhai Khem Singh Granthi of Daska wrote a lengthy answer which is similar to that of Gyani Lall Singh Editor of the *K. Bahadur* and *Panch Khalsa Samachar* Amritsar.

To both of them the five symbols of the Sikhs are the sacred endowments of the Great Guru, who made them absolutely indispensable for the Sikhs.

SAT SRI AKAL.

THE SACRAMENT OF STEEL

HARBANS SINGH

Guru Gobind Singh was the last of the ten Sikh Gurus. He was born on December 22, 1666, at Patna, in Bihar. Among those who travelled to the city upon hearing the happy news was Syed Bhīkhan Shāh, a pious Muslim saint. As the story goes, he held out upon his palms two earthen vessels when he saw the child. The latter touched both. By this Bhīkhan Shāh judged that he would treat all, Hindus and Muslims, alike.

(Guru) Gobind Singh lived at Patna until he was five. Then he was taken to Anandpur. He was nine when his father, Guru Tegh Bahādur, was martyred in Delhi. At that young age, he inherited the responsibility of guiding the Sikh faith and fulfilling the teaching of Guru Nānak. In the midst of his engagement with the concerns of the community, he gave full attention to the mastery of physical skills and literary accomplishment. He had grown into a comely youth, spare, lithe of limb and energetic. His versatility was amazing, and he went through his arduous daily programme with inexhaustible vitality. He rose well before dawn and sat in contemplation of the Eternal One. He then came to the morning assembly where he listened to the holy hymns being sung by the musicians and gave expositions of the sacred word. The rest of the day was spent in recitations of heroic poetry, drills and athletic competitions and in ministering to the needs and problems of the disciples. The evening assembly was followed by common board and concourses far into the night at which news of the government's excesses was discussed and stories were narrated of the preceding Gurus and the Sikhs of their times.

As a result of his assiduous training and practice, Guru Gobind Singh gained unique facility in the use of arms. He showed similar prowess at learning. Besides Punjabi, he gained proficiency in Sanskrit, Braj and Persian. He read the old classics and acquired extensive knowledge of Sanskrit and Persian lore. He had a natural genius for poetic composition. The total verse he wrote would fill a lifetime of exclusive dedication to the Muse. He bore a highly artistic and elegant hand at Gurmukhī calligraphy specimens of which are fortunately preserved on the leaves of some copies of the Holy Book of his time and in the form of his inscriptions on several of his *hukamnāmahs* which have come down to us.

At the age of eleven, Guru Gobind Singh was married to Jitōjī, daughter of Harjas, a resident of Lahore. In contravention of the time-honoured custom, he refused to go to distant Lahore for the wedding. He raised instead a small habitation near Anandpur and called it Lahore. His disciples and followers thronged the place. Harjas came with his family and the nuptial ceremonies were performed amidst much jubilation.

Guru Gobind Singh received an invitation from Rājā Medini Prakāsh of Sirmūr to visit him at Nāhan, his capital, which had a cool climate and abounded in game. Leaving an adequate guard at Anandpur and beating the big drum, Ranjīt Nagārā, to proclaim his departure, Guru Gobind Singh set out towards Nāhan. He halted at Kīratpur where he visited the shrine of his grandfather, Guru Hargobind. As he reached the vicinity of Nāhan (April 14, 1685), the Rājā came out to greet him and considered himself fortunate in having him as his guest. He took him to his palace and looked after him and his Sikhs in a most hospitable manner.

It was not the intention of Guru Gobind Singh to stay as the Rājā's guest for long. While out in pursuit of chase one day, he was fascinated by the natural scenery of a spot on the margin of the Jamunā. The place was within his host's territory, forty-two kilometres from his capital. Guru Gobind Singh set up his camp on that site and laid, on April 29, 1685, the foundation of a fortress. Diwān Nand Chand Sanghā of Darauli performed the *ardās* and Rām Koer, a descendant of Bhāī Buddhā, broke the ground. Guru Gobind Singh named the place Pāontā, from the *pāv* or foot of his horse implanted on this spot when it had instantly attracted his attention.

The years spent in the quiet of Pāontā were the most creative and significant. Apart from the religious and martial training of his followers, Guru Gobind Singh contemplated deeply and long on the state of the people. It was in Pāontā that his grand design for recovery and renovation took shape in his mind. His poetic intuition found exuberant expression, and he created verse which is notable for its sublimity of style, mystical ardour and energy. His object was two-fold : to sing praises of the Timeless and to infuse new vigour into the limp mass of people. His compositions were most appropriately adapted to these purposes. Rarely has poetry in any tongue recaptured the transcendent vision in such personal terms or inspired such a spirit of courage and heroism.

In this poetry, Guru Gobind Singh created a new metaphor—the metaphor of the sword. The sword was the symbol of Akāl Himself. God was described as *Sarbloh*, i.e. All-Steel. This image was intended to give a new orientation to the minds of men given to passivity. They needed a new vocabulary and a new principle of faith. This Guru Gobind Singh provided by coining the new figure. At the beginning of his

autobiographical *Bachitra Nātak*, he used the term Sword for the Tanscendent and said :

*I bow with love and devotion to the Holy Sword,
Assist me that I may be able to complete this work.*

Then follows a ringing invocation to the sword. The diction, a variety of Prakrit, is so powerful and it produces the clangorous rhythm of clashing swords with such force that the verse may be quoted in the original :

*Khaga khanda bihandam khala dala khandam
ati ran mandam bara bandam.
Bhuja danda akhandam tej prachandam
joti amandam bhānu prabham.
Sukha santā karnam durmati darnam
kilbikh harnam asi sarnam.
Jai jai jag karan sristi ubāran
mama pratipāran jai tegham.
Thou art the subduer of kingdoms,
The destroyer of the armies of the wicked.
In the battlefield Thou adornest the brave.
Thy arm is infrangible, Thy brightness refulgent,
Thy radiance and splendour dazzle like the sun.
Thou bestowest happiness on the good,
Thou terrifiest the evil, thou scatterest sinners.
I seek thy protection.
Hail hail to the creator of the world,
The saviour of creation, my cherisher,
Hail to thee, O Sword !*

God and Swōrd became interchangeable terms. The preamble to the Sikh *ardās*, which is of Guru Gobind Singh's composition, begins with the words : "Having first remembered the Sword, meditate on Guru Nānak...."

When Guru Gobind Singh referred to God as Sarbloh or Sword, he was not oblivious of His characteristics of love and compassion. A couplet in his *Jāpu Sāhib* reads :

*I bow to Thee Lord, Who art the wielder of the sword !
I bow to Thee, Lord, Who art the possessor of arms !
I bow to Thee, Lord, Who knowest the ultimate secret !
I bow to Thee, Lord, Who lovest the world like a mother !*

God is symbolized in the weapons of war. He is presented as the Punisher of the Evil and the Destroyer of the Tyrant. The benevolent aspect is simultaneously and equally forcefully emphasized and He is invoked as the Fountain-head of Mercy, the Kinsman of the Poor and the Bestower of Felicity. This fusion of the devotional and the martial, of the spiritual and the heroic was the most important feature of the philosophy of

Guru Gobind Singh and of his career as a spiritual leader and harbinger of a revolutionary impulse.

A brave death on the field of battle for a holy cause was set out as a noble and worthy end. Thus does Guru Gobind Singh supplicate God in one of his hymns :

Grant unto me this boon, O Lord,
That I may never be deterred
from doing good deeds,
I should have no fear of the enemy
when I go to battle,
And turn victory decidedly to my side.
In my mind there is but one desire*
That I may ever be singing Thy praises.
And, when the time comes, I should die
Fighting in the thick of action.

All of Guru Gobind Singh's works reveal the power of his poetic imagination and mystical intuition. They reveal also the amazing range of his learning and knowledge in diverse fields such as mythology, metaphysics, astronomy, human psychology, geography, botany *āyurveda* and warfare. He had a command of several languages such as Braj, Avadhi, Arabic, Persian and Punjabi. His compositions were mostly in Braj which then enjoyed vogue as the language of literary expression. He possessed an uncanny mastery over the magic of words and used them with natural ease to render a variety of moods, scenes and sounds. There was the harmony of the spheres in his verse as well as the irresistible flow of hill rivulets and the graceful sweep of a galloping steed. He adopted many traditional moulds and measures, but his own prosodic innovations were prodigious. Likewise, he created myriads of original images and similes to lend embellishment and meaning to his verse. For its loftiness of tone, resonant timbre and opulence of symbolism, Guru Gobind Singh's poetry remains unmatched. It inspired vast numbers of people and revived and enriched the Indian literary tradition.

Poetry as such was not his aim. For him it was a means of revealing the divine principle and concretizing the personal vision of the Supreme Being that had been vouchsafed to him. Through his poetry he preached love and equality, and a strictly ethical and moral code of conduct. He preached the worship of the One Supreme Being, deprecating idolatry and superstitious beliefs and observances. The glorification of the sword itself was to secure fulfilment of God's justice. The sword was never a symbol of aggression, and it was never used for self-aggrandizement. It stood for righteous and brave action for the protection of truth and virtue. It was the

*To educate my mind I may ever be singing thy praises—Editor.

emblem of manliness and self-respect and was to be used only in self-defence as a last resort. For Guru Gobind Singh said :

When all other means have failed,

It is but righteous to take to the sword.

The tranquil, poesy-laden atmosphere of Pāontā was disturbed by an unnecessary conflict forced upon Guru Gobind Singh. Emperor Aurangzib was too far away, occupied with his campaigns in the South, to take much notice of affairs in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, his feudal vassals, the hill chieftains, had always resented the Guru's presence in their midst. They were especially averse to the way the four castes mingled in the Sikh order. Led by Rājā Fateh Shāh of Srinagar (Garhwāl) and others, they plotted together to make an attack on Pāontā. For the Guru, it was a mystery why they should have done so, for, in his *Bachitra Nātak*, he said that Rājā Fateh Shāh "raged and fought with me purposelessly."

Guru Gobind Singh met the army eleven kilometres north-east of Pāontā, at a place called Bhangānī. The eminence Guru Gobind Singh had chosen was between the Jamunā and its tributary, the Giri. It gave him advantage in strategy. The battle raged fiercely as the two armies faced each other. Guru Gobind Singh's Sikhs, unused to the ways of war, surpassed their trained and professional adversaries in courage and dexterity. This gave them confidence in their arms and the mountain monarchs, who had the worst of the conflict, learnt to respect their power. Among those who fell in action were Sango Shāh and Jīt Mall, cousins of Guru Gobind Singh, and Hathī Chand, brother of Manī Rām. A Sikh who fought with extraordinary valour was Lāl Chand. A confectioner by profession and unused to wielding a sword, he, as says the *Srī Gur Partāp Sūraj Granth*, obtained Guru Gobind Singh's permission and flung into the action. He got the better of the veteran Pathan soldier, Mīr Khān, and slew him on the spot with his sword. The battle of Bhangānī took place on September 18, 1688. Soon thereafter Guru Gobind Singh left for Anandpur.

Baisākhī at Anandpur had always been an occasion for joyous celebrations. For the festival in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh had ordered special preparations to be made. Messages were issued to the Sikhs to come in full strength, wearing arms and maintaining their beards and hair inviolate. Elaborate arrangements were made at Anandpur for the reception of the visitors. The Guru remained absorbed for long intervals and the Sikhs noticed on his face the reflection of his deep meditations. He seemed to be occupied with an unfathomable inner wonder and mystery. Their air in Anandpur was tense with anticipation. Everyone went about his task slightly subdued by the self-consciousness of the moment. A stillness prevailed where used to be so much of energetic fun and gaiety—a stillness which prefigured the birth of a momentous event.

As the Baisākhī day approached, Anandpur started humming with

visitors. On the day of the festival (March 30), Guru Gobind Singh, as usual, rose early, and sat in meditation. He then appeared before the *sangat*, who hailed him with shouts of greetings. Bhāi Mani Rām gave exposition of a *sabad* from the Holy Book. Guru Gobind Singh then stood before the assembly with his sword unsheathed and spoke : "My sword wants today a head. Let any one of my true Sikhs come forward. Isn't there a Sikh of mine who would sacrifice his life for his Guru and the *dharma*?"

His words numbed the audience. They did not know what the Guru meant and gazed in awed silence until he spoke again. Now confusion turned into fear. For the third time Guru Gobind Singh repeated his call. Dayā Rām, a Sobti Khatrī of Lahore, arose and said with humility, "My head is at thy disposal, my True Lord. There could be no greater gain than dying under thy sword." He walked behind the Guru to a tent near by. The Guru returned with his sword dripping blood, and demanded another head. This was more than many could endure. People started leaving the place. Some of them went to complain to the Guru's mother. But Dharma Dās, a Jat of Hastināpur, stood up and said with folded hands, "Thy humble servant offers himself, Great Lord ! He had consecrated his head to thee, True King, when he became thy Sikh." Guru Gobind Singh made three more calls. Mohkam Chand of Dwārkā, Himmat of Jagannāth, and Sāhib Chand of Bidar cheerfully responded one after another and advanced to offer their heads.

After a while, Guru Gobind Singh led the five Sikhs back from the tent into which he had taken them one by one. In that tent, erected on a hillock and confidentially guarded, he had kept sets of apparel especially made. Decked in saffron-coloured gorgeous raiment topped over with neatly tied turbans of the same colour, the Glorious Five walked deferentially behind their Master, overwhelmed with thankfulness. The Master was himself attired in the same manner as his chosen disciples. The assembly, considerably thinned and still in shocked muteness, was further puzzled to see those whom they had thought to have been sacrificed to the Guru's whim return in flesh and blood.

The Guru introduced his companions to the audience as *Punj Piāre*, the five devoted spirits beloved of the Guru. He gave vent to his feelings of immense gratefulness for the culmination which had crowned Guru Nānak's revelation. He said the Five Beloved had blessed themselves and brought glory to their faith. They would, added Guru Gobind Singh, form the nucleus of the order of the Khālsā, God's Own, he was going to inaugurate.

He then proceeded to perform the ceremony of baptism. Filling an iron bowl with clean water, he kept churning it with a two-edged sword while reciting over it the sacred verses. The Guru's wife, Mātā Jitōjī,

brought sugar crystals which were put into the vessel at the Guru's bidding. Sweetness was thus mingled with the alchemy of iron.* *Amrit*, the Nectar of Immortality, was now ready.

The Guru gave the five Sikhs each five palmsful of it to drink. The disciple sat *bhāsan*, i.e. in the heroic posture, with the left knee up and the right knee on the ground. Every time the Master poured the nectar into his palm, he called out aloud : *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh* (Hail the Khālsā who belongs to the Lord God ! Hail the Lord God to Whom belongs the victory !!). The Sikh repeated the blessed utterance. After the five life-giving draughts had been administered, the Master sprinkled the holy liquid into his face, gazing intently into his eyes and kindling his spirit with his own inner light. He then anointed his hair with the nectar, consecrating it eternally to the Lord. At the end, all five of them were given the steel bowl to quaff from it, turn by turn, the remaining elixir in token of their having become brothers. Their rebirth into this brotherhood meant the cancellation of their previous family ties, of the occupations which had hitherto determined their place in society, of their earlier beliefs and creeds and of the ritual they had so far observed. Their worship was now to be addressed to none except Akāl, the Timeless One. Their father was Guru Gobind Singh and their place of birth Anandpur. The moment marked for them a complete break with their past.

The five Sikhs—three of them the so-called low-castes, a Kshatriya and a Jat—formed the nucleus of the self-abnegating, martial and casteless fellowship of the Khālsā. Guru Gobind Singh had brought into being. They were given the surname of Singh, meaning lion, and were ever to wear the five emblems of the Khālsā—the *kesha* or long hair and beard, *kanghā*, a comb in the *kesha* to keep it tidy as against the recluses who kept it matted in token of their having renounced the world, *karā*, a steel bracelet, *kachh*, short breeches worn by the soldiers of that time, and *kirpān*, a sword. They were enjoined to succour the helpless and fight the oppressor, to have faith in One God and to consider all human beings equal, irrespective of caste and creed.

Guru Gobind Singh asked the five initiated Sikhs to prepare the *amrit* as he had done. When it was ready, he stood before them with folded hands and besought them to baptize him into their brotherhood. This sounded to the disciples as a strange request, but he explained by telling them that the order of the Khālsā had been created under the direct command of Akāl. The Guru must be one of them, for there was to be no difference between him and the Khālsā. He had created the Khālsā in his own image. The Khālsā was his embodiment, his *alter ego* and his much beloved ideal (*isht*

*Putting of sugar crystals into the bowl, however elucidates the role of woman in the creation of Khālsā—Editor.

(*suhird*).

The Guru always spoke of his Sikhs with the highest appreciation and esteem. In the "Khālsā Mahimā," in the *Dasam Granth*, he wrote :

My battles I have won through the favour of my Sikhs;
 Through their favour have I been able to dispense largesse.
 Through their favour my troubles have receded,
 And through their favour my prosperity expanded.
 It is through their favour that
 I acquired knowledge;
 Through their favour I subdued my enemies.
 Through their favour am I exalted;
 There are, else, millions of such humble persons as myself.....
 Let my body, my mind, my head, my wealth, and all that is mine
 Be to them consecrated !

The Five Sikhs, now invested with authority as Khālsā, stirred water and sugar-puffs in the manner sanctified by the Master. Then he sat in front of his disciples, his left knee up and the right one on the ground, and went through the ceremony of initiation, shouting, repeatedly after them, the newly coined greeting : *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh*. "Hail," as the poet subsequently sang, "Gobind Singh who is himself master as well as disciple." On being baptized by his own disciples, his name was changed from Gobind Rāi to Gobind Singh. In this process, he had merged himself into the Khālsā and endowed it with the charisma of his own personality.

To quote from a report of the proceedings : "Though several refused to accept the Guru's religion, about twenty thousand men stood up and promised to obey him, as they had the fullest faith in his divine message." The novitiates came forward in batches to receive the baptism. The first five among those who now volunteered were Rām Singh, Devā Singh, Tahal Singh, Īshar Singh and Fateh Singh. They were called by the Guru Panj Mukte, the Five Liberated Ones. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, in the next row stood Manī Rām, Bachittar Dās, Ude Rāi, Anik Dās, Ajab Dās, Ajaib Chand, Chaupat Rāi, Diwān Dharam Chand, Ālam Chand Nachnā and Sāhib Rām Koer, followed by Rāi Chand Multānī. Gurbakhsh Rāi, Gurbakhshīsh Rāi, Pandit Kirpā Rām Datt of Mattan, Subeg Chand, Gurmukh Dās, Sanmukh Dās, Amrit Chand, Purohit Dayā Rām, Barnā, Ghanī Dās, Lāl Chand Peshaurīā, Rūp Chand, Sodhī Dīp Chand, Nand Chand, Nānū Rām of Dilwālī, and Hazārī, Bhandārī and Darbārī of Sirhind. Countless more batches came, each one more eager than the other. Anandpur was seized with an uncanny fervour of the spirit. Baptismal ceremonies continued for several days and thousands of Sikhs entered the fold of the Khālsā, renewing themselves in body as well as in soul.

Further injunctions were laid down for the Sikhs. They must never cut or trim their hair and beards, nor smoke tobacco. A Sikh must not have

sexual relationship outside the marital bond, nor eat the flesh of an animal killed slowly in the Muslim way. Violation of any of these rules led to his excommunication from the Khālsā. To return to the fold, he must be rebaptized, make expiation which could mean rendering personal service in the community kitchen or cleaning the shoes of the *sangat* assembled in religious prayer, and pledge himself not to repeat the offence. The Sikhs were forbidden to have anything to do with those who worshipped images, killed their daughters or countenanced *satī*. They were asked to eat regardless of caste with those who had been baptized and deem them their brothers, to assist one another in time of need, to live by the toil of their hands, never begging for charity, and to contribute one-tenth of their earnings for the common purposes of the community. They were not to covet property or money offered in the name of religion. Such offerings were strictly tabooed for the Sikhs and Guru Gobind Singh often used to quote to them the following verse of Bhāi Gurdās :

As is the custom of Hindus to abstain form the flesh of kine,
 As swine and interest are forbidden the Muhammadans,
 As a father-in-law is prohibited from drinking even water in his son-in-law's house,
 As a sweeper, though hungry, will not eat hare's flesh,
 As a fly gaineth no advantage but dieth in the clasp of honey,
 So is greed for sacred offerings which are like poison coated with sugar.

The inauguration of the Khālsā was the realization of Guru Gobind Singh's divinely inspired vision and of his design for the uplift of the people. It was a grand creative deed of history conceived to bring about a revolutionary change in the minds of men and arouse their dormant energies for positive and altruistic action. They were to be made conscious of the disabilities of their state, of their servitude and abjectness and taught to stand up on their feet and work ceaselessly and courageously to redeem their predicament. They were to be rid of the superstitions and divisions which had enfeebled and entombed their spirit for centuries and were given a new conceit of themselves and their destiny. A new impulse of chivalry arose in northern India and it resulted in an endless chain of shining deeds of sacrifice and gallantry, giving an irrevocable turn to the course of events.

How Guru Gobind Singh shook out of their lassitude people reconciled for long to their fallen state, their will to action completely atrophied, is one of the miracles of history. To his invitation to join the new order he had initiated to fight oppression, the hill *rājās* had replied, "Each Turk can eat a whole goat. How can we, who eat only rice, cope with such strong men? Can sparrows kill hawks, or jackals face tigers?" This psyche of defeat and surrender, not peculiar to the hill *rājās* alone,

had to be superseded. By the alchemy of his *amrit*, the baptismal nectar, and all the metaphysics which culminated in this regenerative principle, Guru Gobind Singh touched the people's hearts with faith and courage. He made one Sikh equal to a host of "a lakh and a quarter" and had "hawks" killed by "sparrows". Even the castaways of Indian society—sweepers, barbers, weavers and others—long suppressed and ostracized, who had never touched a sword and would have cowered at the sight of blood, were turned into stout-hearted warriors. Thus did Guru Gobind Singh transfuse life into the languid and inert body of India.

Guru Gobind Singh had heard complaints against *masands*, heads of *sangats*, in various part of the country. They had strayed from the path of duty. Most of them were corrupt. They took offerings from the Sikhs, and misused them. They lived in luxury and neglected their religious function. The Guru decided to abolish the system and summoned all the *masands* to Anandpur. Those found guilty were punished.

The free and equalitarian society taking shape in the very citadel of conservatism evoked hostile reaction. The hill aristocrats were especially intolerant. Several of them joined hands and made successive attacks on Anandpur. The fiercest onslaught made was in 1705, when they came aided by Mughal troops from Lahore and Sirhind. The Sikhs, including Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son, Ajit Singh, fought valiantly.

At the end of the day's fighting, some of the disciples complained to the Guru that a Sikh, called Kanhaiyā, had been giving water and aid not only to be wounded Sikhs but also to the enemy. The Guru asked Kanhaiyā if this was true. "Yes, my lord, it is true in a sense," said Kanhaiyā. "I have been giving water to everyone who needed it on the field of battle, but I saw no Mughals or Sikhs there. I saw only the Guru's face everywhere." The Guru was pleased with his reply, blessed him and told his Sikhs that Kanhaiyā had understood his teaching correctly.

The chieftains suffered heavy losses, but succeeded in laying siege to the main fort of Anandpur. The Sikhs continued the struggle and for several months the fight went on. The provisions inside ran short. The Sikhs faced starvation. As the siege persisted, the position of the garrison worsened. Some Sikhs suggested evacuation, but Guru Gobind Singh rejected the proposal. A few Sikhs wavered in their faith and insisted on leaving. The Guru told them that they could go if they were prepared to disown him. Forty Sikhs wrote a letter disowning the Guru and left.

Guru Gobind Singh was, however, finally forced to leave Anandpur on the night of December 5-6, 1705. He gave the pursuing troops battle at Chamkaur (December 7, 1705). Most of the handful of his Sikhs, including there of the Panj Piāre, i.e. Bhāi Mohkam Singh, Bhāi Sāhib Singh and Bhāi Himmat Singh, were killed. He then sent into the field his two elder

sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhār Singh, aged eighteen and fourteen. Both of them fell fighting bravely.

Losing nearly all of his brave and devoted Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh left the fort of Chamkaur. Two of his sons had been killed in battle. The younger two—nine-year-old Zorāwar Singh and seven-year-old Fateh Singh—were for their refusal to renege their faith bricked up alive in a wall at Sirhind. They were beheaded under the orders of the Mughal satrap, as the masonry came up to their necks. Yet unshaken was Guru Gobind Singh's faith. Reclining under a tree in a lonely jungle with a broken vessel supporting his head, he sang :

Soft beds, dear Friend, beloved God,
Are but a torment without Thee,
Residence in mansions like living among serpents,
The wine goblet is like the cross,
its rim like the dagger.
All this, without Thee, is like
the keenness of a butcher's thrust !
To dwell with Thee in adversity, dear Friend,
is better, far better
Than residence in palaces without Thee.

Guru Gobind Singh sojourned widely in south-east Punjab. From Dīnā, a village in present-day Farīdkot district, he wrote to Aurangzeb a letter in Persian verse called *Zafarnāmah*, the Epistle of Victory. He stressed in the composition how the ethical principle should have supremacy in matter of public policy as well as of private behaviour. Victory and defeat were to be judged by the ultimate standards of morality, and not by temporary material advantage. The epistle was a severe indictment of Aurangzeb, who was repeatedly upbraided for breach of faith in the attack made by his troops on the Sikhs after they had vacated Anandpur on the solemn assurances of safe passage given them by him and his officers. By the candid and unambiguous terms in which the emperor and his policies were castigated in it, the *Zafarnāmah* should easily be the most forthright essay on the centrality of truth in diplomacy. It emphatically reiterated the sovereignty of morality in the affairs of State as much as in the conduct of individual human beings, and regarded the means as important as the end. Absolute truthfulness was as much the duty of a sovereign as of any one of the ordinary citizens.

Two of the Guru's Sikhs, Dayā Singh and Dharam Singh, carried the *Zafarnāmah* to Ahmadnagar. They had difficulty in securing access to the emperor, but once the document reached the latter's hands, he was deeply impressed to read it. According to the *Ahkām-i-Ālamgīrī*, he immediately sent through Muhammad Beg, a *gurbardār* or mace-bearer, and Shaikh Yār Muhammad, a *mansabdār*, a *farmān* to Mun'im Khān, deputy

governor of Lahore, asking him to make peace with Guru Gobind Singh. He also invited the Guru for a personal meeting. The *Guru kīān Sākhiān* confirms the invitation sent by Aurangzeb and mentions two *gurzbardārs* accompanying Bhāi Dayā Singh and Bhāi Dharm Singh back to the Punjab.

The Sirhind troops had been in pursuit of Guru Gobind Singh. The forty Sikhs, who had renounced the Guru at Anandpur were also following him, full of remorse. They were chided by their womenfolk for having deserted the Guru in the hour of difficulty, and now sought to make reparation for their faithlessness. At Khidrānā or Isharsar, they engaged the pursuing force on December 29, 1705, and fought heroically against heavy odds. Guru Gobind Singh, who happened to be in the vicinity, reached the scene of battle in the evening. He saw that all of the forty Sikhs had fallen in action. One of them Mahān Singh, lay dying. The Guru promised him any boon he might ask of him. Mahān Singh was happy to see his Master just before his end. He begged him to tear up the letter he and his companions had signed before leaving Anandpur. The paper, which Guru Gobind Singh had preserved through many a strenuous day, was torn. The forty dead were blessed as the Forty *Muktās*, the Forty Immortals. Isharsar became Muktsar.

Guru Gobind Singh left Khidrānā and, passing through several villages, reached Lakkhī Jungle, a forest between the towns of Bhatindā and Kot Kapūrā. He was impressed by the seclusion and freedom it afforded and decided to stop there awhile. Hearing the news, Sikhs poured in from all sides to see him after prolonged separation—a period marked by harsh and violent events. But there was no trace on Guru Gobind Singh's face of those bitter days.

The next important point of halt was what later came to be known as Damdamā Sāhib, where Guru Gobind Singh arrived on January 17, 1706. Many old Sikhs and bards and poets re-joined him here and felt happily rewarded by a sight of him. The spirit of hilly Anandpur was revived in sandy Damdamā. Guru Gobind Singh proposed to prepare an authorized version of the Granth Sāhib which had had several discrepant transcriptions. The first copy of the Granth Sāhib was transcribed by Bhāi Gurdas at Guru Arjan's dictation. It was the privilege now of Bhāi Manī Singh to write as Guru Gobind Singh spoke. Guru Gobind Singh added to the Volume the compositions of his father, Guru Tegh Bahādur, but none of his own. His writings were subsequently collected by Bhāi Manī Singh and compiled into what came to be known as the *Dasam Granth* or the Book of the Tenth Master.

Dayā Singh and Dharam Singh, who had gone to the Deccan with the *Zafarnāmah*, were still being awaited, when Guru Gobind Singh decided to travel to the South himself. He invited Sikhs from all places before leaving

Damdāmā Sāhib. As records the *Gurukīān Sākhīān*, from Ramdās came Gurbakhsh Singh (Rām Koer), of the family of Bhāī Buddhā; from Amritsar, Bhāī Manī Singh with Bhūpat Singh and Gulzār Singh; from Ajnālā, Mahtāb Singh; from Dhilwān, Sodhī Kanwal Nain with his son, Abhai Singh; from Duburjī of Ude Karan, Gurdās Singh; from Bhāī Rūpā, Dharam Singh with a *sangat* of the Brārs; from Sodharā, Bhāī Bajar Singh; from Phūl, Rām Singh with his brother Talok Singh; from Bhuchcho, Bhāī Godarīā Singh; and from Mahimā Ablū, Dān Singh with his son, Gurbakhsh Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh had the Granth Sāhib installed upon an elevated spot, later designated as Damdamā Sāhib by which name the habitation is known to this day. Bhāī Manī Singh was asked to start a continuous reading of the Sacred Book. The commencement hymn received by him is recorded in the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*. This was Guru Arjan's *sabad*, in measure Todī :

To thy protection have I turned,
my Lord !
Give me the gift of Thy Name,
of Thy praise,
So in harmony may I dwell,
Erasing the unease of my mind.
At Thy door have I at last
thrown myself,
No other refuge do I know.
Rescue this worthless one, O Lord.
Bring me not to account;
By this concession alone could I
be saved.
Thou art forgiver ever,
ever beneficent,
By Thy support are all sustained.
Slave Nānak follows in the footsteps
of holy saints,
Liberate me, O Lord, here and now.

The recitation was concluded on the third day. *Karāhprasād* was distributed. On October 30, 1706, Guru Gobind Singh departed from Damdamā Sahib.

He was in Rajputana when news arrived of the death, on February 20, 1707, of Aurangzeb. The Guru now turned his footsteps towards Delhi. The emperor's death was a signal for the usual war of succession. Among his sons, Muazzam, the eldest, had the reputation of being a liberal man and he was the rightful heir to the throne. On his request, Guru Gobind Singh sent a body of Sikhs to defend his right to the crown. The battle of Jājaū, near Agra, on June 8, 1707, proved decisive, and Muazzam became emperor of India, with the title of Bahādur Shāh.

Not long afterwards, Guru Gobind Singh left Delhi for Agra and, visiting Mathura and Brindaban on the way, set up camp in a garden outside the city. On hearing of his arrival, the emperor extended to him an invitation to meet him. Guru Gobind Singh set out under an escort of chosen Sikhs and was received by Bahādur Shāh with great honour on July 23, 1707. The emperor expressed immense happiness at seeing the Guru and thanked him for his visit and for the help he had given him in the battle of Jājāū. Before he departed, Bahādur Shāh, presented him, in token of his homage, with a *khill'at*, including a jewelled scarf, a *dhukhdukhī*, and an aigrette or *kalghī*. The Guru's attendant who waited outside the hall was called in to carry the dress of honour to his camp, contrary to the Mughal practice of the recipient having to put it on in the court.

This meeting not only established cordial relations between Guru Gobind Singh and the emperor, but also became the starting point of parleys between the two on the question of the State's religious policy. Both of them agreed to resume these subsequently, and the Guru was hopeful that he would be able to return to the Punjab at the conclusion of the dialogue that had been opened. He issued letters to his Sikhs to this effect. One of these, addressed to the congregation of Dhaul, has been recently traced. It reads :

Sarbat sangat Dhaul kī tusī merā Khālsā ho. Gurū rākhegā Gurū Gurū japnā janam sauregā. Sarb Sukh nāl pātshāh pās āe, siropāo ar sāth hazār kī dhukhdukhī jarāū inām hoi. Hor bhi kam Gurū kā sadkā sabh hote hai. Asī bhī thore hī dinām nū āvate hān. Sarbat sangat khālse nū merā hukam hai, āpas mo mel karnā, jad asī Kahlūr āvate tad sarbat Khālse hathiār bannh kai hazūr āvanā Jo āvegā so nihāl hovaigā. Sammat 1764 mitī katko 1 mā

To the sangat of Dhaul : You are my Khālsā. The Guru will protect you. Repeat Guru, Guru [always remember the Great Master]. With all happiness, we came to the Pātshāh. A dress of honour and a jewelled *dhukhdukhī* worth sixty thousand was presented to us. With the Guru's grace, the other things are also progressing satisfactorily. In a few days, we are also coming. My instruction to the entire Khālsā *sangat* is to remain united; when we arrive at Kahlūr, the entire Khālsā should come armed. He who comes shall be happy....Sammat 1764, dated Kartik 1/October 2, 1707.

But Bahādur Shāh had to leave suddenly for the Deccan to quell a rebellion by his brother, Kām Bakhsh. Guru Gobind Singh, instead of coming to the Punjab, travelled south with him to continue the negotiations. The two camps marched together and the Guru and the emperor found time to have long conversations on subjects spiritual and temporal. Sometimes the Guru would break away from the caravan to impart his message to the people of the territories through which he was

now journeying.

The escorts of the two camps often fell into mutual wrangling. Some of the Mughal soldiers had fought against the Sikhs at Anandpur in Wazir Khān's army, and they inwardly resented the friendly turn in the State's attitude towards Guru Gobind Singh. They deliberately provoked Sikhs who, in turn, would often retaliate. To pacify one such squabble, the Guru sent one of his Sikhs, Mān Singh, who was wise and tactful. But rather than appreciate his peaceable intent, one of the Mughal escort killed him on the spot. The emperor was very sorry to hear of the incident and ordered the murderer to be arrested and then surrendered to Guru Gobind Singh for punishment. But the Guru forgave him and let him return to the royal camp.

As the Guru passed through the princely cities of Jaipur and Jodhpur, the Rajput rājās sent their envoys to wait upon him and do him homage. The camps crossed the Narbadā into the Deccan and travelled further south to reach Nanded, on the Godāvari, towards the end of August 1708. Guru Gobind Singh's negotiations with Bahādur Shāh remained inconclusive. He found the emperor evasive and helpless to take any action against fanatical satraps like Wazir Khān of Sirhind. the Guru saw little profit in pursuing the parleys.

On reaching Nanded, Guru Gobind Singh came upon the hermitary of a Bairāgī sādhu, Mādhō Dās, who was believed to possess magical powers. Finding him absent from his hut, the Guru laid himself down on his couch to wait for him, while his Sikhs killed a goat to cook meat for the evening meal. Mādhō Dās was furious at this profanation of his monastery, and burnt with the desire to chastise the strange visitor for his temerity. But no sooner did he set his eyes on the Guru than all his anger was gone; so was his sorcerous will of which he was greatly proud. He fell at the Guru's feet and called himself his *bandā*, or slave. The brief colloquy which took place is set down by Ahmad Shāh Batālī in his *Zikr-i-Gurūān wā Ibtidā-i-Singhān wā Mazhab-i-Eshān*, based on contemporary records of his ancestors :

Mādhō Dās : Who are you?

Guru Gobind Singh : He whom you know.

Mādhō Dās : What do I know?

Guru Gobind Singh : Think it over in your mind.

Mādhō Dās (after a pause): So you are Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh : Yes.

Mādhō Dās : What have you come here for?

Guru Gobind Singh : I have come so that I may convert you into a disciple of mine.

Mādhō Dās : I submit, my Lord, I am a *bandā* (slave) of yours.

Mādhō Dās was baptized on September 3, 1708, with the rites and

vows of the Khālsā and given the name of Bandā Singh. The Gurū gave him five arrows from his own quiver and an escort, including five of his chosen Sikhs—Bhagwant Singh, Koer Singh, Bāj Singh, Binod Singh and Kāhn Singh, and directed him to go to the Punjab to carry on the campaign against the provincial overlords. Bandā Singh marched northwards, stormed Sirhind, and punished Wazīr Khān. He shook the Mughal rule to its foundations by his successive victories until he was overcome and seized and cruelly done to death in Delhi in 1716.

Guru Gobind Singh was in environs which greatly pleased his heart. Having lived all his life within hearing of the murmurous music of the flowing waters—at Patna where he was born it was the Gangā, at Anandpur, the Sutlej, at Pāontā, the Jamunā—he had a special fascination for a riparian abode. The secluded town of Nanded on the margin of the gently moving, slumberous Godāvarī naturally attracted him and he decided to settle there. But he had not a long earthly span left him.

Nawāb Wazīr Khān of Sirhind had felt concerned at the emperor's conciliatory treatment of Guru Gobind Singh. Their marching together to the south made him jealous, and he charged two of his trusted men with murdering the Guru before his increasing friendship with the emperor resulted in any harm to himself. These two Pathans—Jamshed Khān and Wāsil Beg are the names given in the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*—pursued the Guru secretly and overtook him at Nanded. They frequently visited the Sikh camp and familiarized themselves with the Guru as well as with his followers. One day, as he lay in his chamber resting after the *Rahīrās* prayer, one of the Pathans suddenly fell upon him and stabbed him in the left side near the heart. Before he could attack again, Guru Gobind Singh struck him down with his sabre. His companion fell under the swords of the Sikhs who had rushed in on hearing the noise.

As the news reached Bahādur Shāh's camp, he sent expert surgeons, including an Englishman, to attend on Guru Gobind Singh, and his injury was healed. But, not long after, as he stretched a powerful bow, the wound broke out again and bled profusely. This weakened, beyond recovery, the physical frame which had withstood such stormy times.

On October 6, 1708, Guru Gobind Singh called the disciples to his presence and reminded them how Akāl's Will had to be cheerfully accepted under all conditions and at all times. He asked for the Sacred Volume to be brought forth. To quote the *Bhatt Vahī Talaudā Parganaḥ Jīnd* :

Gurū Gobind Singhjī, mahilā dasmān, betā Gurū Tegh Bahādurjī kā, potā Gurū Hargobindjī kā, parpotā Gurū Arjanjī kā, bans Gurū Rām Dāsījī kī, Sūrajbansī Gosal gotra, Sodhī Khatri, bāsī Anandpur, parganaḥ Kahlūr, muqām Nanded tat Godāvarī, des dakkān, sammat

satrān sai painsath Kārtik mās kī chauth, sukla pakkhe, budhvār ke dihun, Bhāi Dayā Singh se bachan hoyā, Srī Granth Sāhib lai do, bachan pāi Dayā Singh Srī Granth Sāhib lai dye. Gurūjī ne panch paise nārīāl āge bhetā rūkhā, mātā tekā sarbatt sangat se kahā merā hukam hai merī jāgāh Srī Granthjī ko jānanā, jo Sikh jānegā tis ki ghāl thāen pāegī Gurū tis kī bahurī karegā, satt kar mānanā.

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Tegh Bahādur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjun. of the family of Guru Rām Dās, Sūrajbansi, Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, *parganah* Kahlūr, now at Nanded, in the Godāvarī country in the Deccan, asked Bhāi Dayā Singh, on Wednesday, October 6, 1708, to fetch Srī Granth Sāhib. In obedience to his orders, Dayā Singh brought Srī Granth Sāhib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the *sangat*, "It is my commandment : Own Srī Granthjī in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth."

According to Giānī Garjā Singh who discovered this entry, the author is Narbud Singh Bhatt, son of Kesho Singh Bhatt. Narbud Singh was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded at that time.

Another contemporary document which authenticates the fact of Guru Granth Sāhib having been invested with the final authority is a letter issued by reference of Mātā Sundarījī. To quote from the original, which is now in the possession of Bhāi Chet Singh, of the village of Bhāi Rūpā, to whose ancestors it was addressed :

Ikk Oankār Wāhgurū jī kī fateh. Srī Akālpurkhjī kā Khālsā yak rang jinā dihiā Wāhgurūjī chit āvai. Bhāi Sāhib Dān Singhjī Bhāi Dunī Singhjī Bhāi Jagat Singhjī Bhāi Gurbakhsh Singhjī Ugar Singhjī Bhāi Rām Singhjī sarbatt Khālsā Wāhgurū Akālpurkhjī kā pāse likhtam gulām Khālsā jī kā Kāhn Singh Nival Singh Mūl Singhjī Sujan Singh Gajā Singh Mahān Singh sarbatt Khālsā Wāhgurū Akālpurkh kā Wāhgurū jī kī fateh vāchanī khushā karnā ki Wāhgurū Akālpurkhjī har dam chit āvai sukh hoe Khālse jī kā bol bālā hoi ardās tusādī mārfat Bhāi Dulchā Singh ke hath pahutī parhkai Khālsājī bahut khushwaqat hoiyā tusāde bāb Khālsājī dayāl ho kai hath jore hai jo rakhyā hove. "Jo jan harikā sevako hari tiske kāmī." Gurū Gurū japnā Wāhgurū ang sang hai fajal karkai rakhia hovegī Khālsājī Bhāi Kāhn Singhjī kau Mātā Sāhibjī ne gumāstgiri Amritsar jī kī mukarar kūtī hai Khālsājī ne gurmatā karke Harimandir ate bāgh dī murammat imāarat kā kām shurū kītā Srī Mātā Sāhibjī ne likhā hai ki Wāhgurū Akālpurh jī kī nagarī hai langar jarūr karnā... Khālsā Srī Wāhgurū jī kā suchet bibek budh chāhie jo sīvāi Akālpurkh dūje no jāndi nāhī. Dasān Pātshāhīān tak jāmai paidhe yārvīn bārvīn Bandā Chaubandā Ajītā

vagaire te aikāḍ lai āvanā hatiyā hai. Hor hatiyā Gurū japan nāl dūr hosan. par ih hatiyā gunāh bakshīaigā nāhī jo manukh ke jāme upar aikāḍ karenge. 'Mukh [mohi] pherīai mukh [mohi] jūthā hoi.' Khālsā jī tusān sīvāi Akāl dūje no mannanā nāhi. Sabad dasvīn pātshāhī tāk khojnā. "Sabad khoji ihu gharu lahai Nānak tākā dāsu." Gurū kā nivās sabad vich hai. "Gur mahi āp samoi sabad, vartāiyā." "Jiān andar jī sabad hai jīt sahu milāvā hoi." Wāhgurū jī kī fateh. Bhāi Mehar Singh tahlīā Bhāi Būle kīā pattar ke khasmāne vich rahinā Gurū nāl gandh paisī.

Ikḱ Oankār Wāhgurū jī kī Fateh

The Khālsā, of the Timeless Himself, immersed in the One, and whose sight brings Wāhgurū to mind. Addressed to Bhāi Sāhib Dān Singhjī, Bhāi Dunī Singhjī, Bhāi Jagat Singhjī, Bhāi Gurbaksh Singhjī, Ugar Singhjī, Bhāi Rām Singhjī, the entire Khālsā of Wāhgurū, the Timeless One. From the slaves of the Khālsājī, Kāhn Singhjī, Nival Singh, Mūl Singhjī, Sujān Singh, Gajā Singh, Mahā Singh, Wāhgurūjī kī Fateh to the entire Khālsā. May you be rejoiced in constant remembrance of the Timeless Wahigurū. May prosperity prevail, may supremacy belong to the Khālsa. Having received your missive through Bhāi Dulchā Singh, Khālsājī is highly pleased. Khālsājī happily prays with folded hands for your security. "He who to Lord surrenders himself, his affairs, the Lord will set to rights." Repeat always the name of Gurū. Wāhgurū is by your side. He will extend to you His grace and protection. Khālsājī, Mātā Sāhibjī has appointed Bhāi Kāhn Singhjī to the superintendence of Amritsarjī. The Khālsājī, through a *gurmata*, has taken in hand the construction and repair of the Harimandir and the garden. Shīrī mātā Sāhibjī has written that *langar* must be run in that place which is the abode of God Himself...Wāhgurū's Khālsā must always be alert, be possessed of discriminating wisdom. The Khālsā must believe in none other than the Timeless One. There have been only Ten Masters in human form: to believe in the eleventh and twelfth, Bandā [Bandā Singh Bahādur], Ajitā [Ajit Singh, adopted son of Mātā Sundarjī], etc., is a mortal sin. Every other sin can be had cancelled by repeating the Guru's name, but this sin of beliving in human forms will not be remitted. "The faces turned away from the Guru are faces perverted." Khālsājī, you must believe in none other except the Timeless One. Go only to the Ten Gurus in search of the Word. "Nānak is the slave of him who by seeking the Lord's Name obtains his goal." The Guru resides in *sabad*, "The Lord hath merged His own Self in the Guru through whom He hath revealed His Word." The Word is the life of all life, for, through it, one experiences God." Victory to the Lord. Bhāi Mehar Singh, the messenger, son of Bhāi Būlā : keep the letter secure in your custody. You will gain the Guru's favour.

From this letter, it is clear how the Sikhs after Guru Gobind Singh believed that the Guruship had passed to the *sabad*, i.e. Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sāhib. None in human form after the Ten Gurus was to be acknowledged by the Sikhs as Guru. Those who, like some of Bandā Singh's or Ajit Singh's followers, called their leaders Gurus are committing a mortal sin. All other sins, says the letter, could be had forgiven by repeating the Guru's name, but not the sin of believing in a living Guru after the Ten Masters of the Sikh faith.

Another authority that may relevantly be quoted is Devaraja Sharma's *Nānakacandrodayamahākāvyam*, an old Sanskrit manuscript which has recently been published by Sanskrit University, Vārāṇasī. It records Guru Gobind Singh's proclamation that Scripture would be the Guru after him. While the Master lay on his deathbed, Nand Lāl (?) came forward and asked the following question : "Who shall be our teacher now? Whom shall we salute and see and what shall be the object of our discourses?" The Master replied, "The Granth, which itself is the doctrine of the Guru, shall be your teacher. This is what you should see; this is what you should honour; this is what should be the object of your discourses" The original, in Sanskrit, reads as follows :

*Nandalālas tadāprcchat ko asmākam adhunā guruh
kam namena ca paśyema kasmai vārtā vadema ca
ūce gurustu yusmākam grantha eva gururmatah
tam nameta ca paśyeta tasmai vārtā vadeta ca*

Nānakacandrodayamahākāvyam, XXI. 227-229

That the Guru Granth is Guru eternal for it has been the understanding and conviction of the Sikh community since the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh. In their hard, exilic days soon afterwards, when they were outlawed and had to seek the safety of hills and jungles, the Sikhs' most precious possession which they cherished and defended at the cost of their lives was the Guru Granth. The Holy Book was their sole religious reference, and they acknowledged none other. In the time of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, who established sovereignty in the name of the Khālsā, personal piety and court ceremonial centred upon the Guru Granth. As contemporary records testify, Ranjīt Singh began his day making obeisance to the Guru Granth. On festive occasions, he made pilgrimage to Amritsar to bow before the Guru Granth in the Harimandir. For the Sikhs in general, Guru Granth was the only focus of religious attachment. None other existed either in human form or in the form of a symbol. In all Sikh literature after Guru Gobind Singh, the Holy Book is uniformly referred to as the *Guru Granth*.

The personal Guruship was thus ended by Guru Gobind Singh himself. Succession now passed to the Guru Granth in perpetuity. This was

a most significant development in the history of the community. The finality of the Holy Book was a fact rich in religious and social implications. The Guru Granth was acknowledged as the medium of the Divine revelation descended through the Gurus. It was for the Sikhs the perpetual authority, spiritual as well as historical. They lived their religion in response to it. Through it, they were able to observe their faith more fully, more vividly. It was central to all that subsequently happened in Sikh life. From it the community's ideals, institutions and rituals derived their meaning. It constituted the regulative principle for its aspiration and action, the integral focus of its psyche.

The Word enshrined in the Holy Granth was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued for ever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth as his successor. It was only through the Word that Guruship could be made everlasting. This object Guru Gobind Singh secured by his uncanny vision and genius. The Guru Granth was henceforth, and for all time to come, the Guru for the Sikhs.

Guru Gobind Singh uttered a spirited *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh*, to bid his last farewell to the Sikhs—Sikhs who loved him above everything else and had dared and achieved so much under his direction and inspiration and for whose sake he had considered no sacrifice too great. As the Sikhs responded with *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh*, he departed this life in the early hours of October 7, 1708. Thus passed from the earthly scene a great teacher and regenerator of mankind—the anointed messenger who revealed God's ways and Will to the people and showed by personal example the ultimate possibilities of the human soul for compassionate as well as for heroic action and for suffering in vindication of the highest truth and values known to man.

The Sikhs made preparations for the obsequies. The sacred body was placed on the pyre erected inside an enclosure formed of tent-walls and the fire was lit amidst the chanting of holy hymns. The *Sohilā* was then recited and *karāhparsād* was distributed. Away from the Punjab and bereft of the physical appearance of the Master, Sikhs felt an emptiness they had not known before in their history beginning from Guru Nānak. But they remembered the words of the Guru who had blended himself with the Khālsā. This sense of the indwelling presence of the Guru, through the Guru Granth and the Panth, which meant the collective body of the Khālsā, gradually took hold of them and, in course of time, permeated the collective consciousness, of the community. This has been the Sikhs' living belief which has shaped the course of their history and led to one of the

noblest endeavours in the annals of mankind in the cause of humanity, dignity and freedom.

Guru Gobind Singh's work is best understood as the fulfilment of Guru Nānak's revelation. Explaining the purpose of his life in the *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh said :

*For this purpose was I born,
Understand all ye pious people,
To uphold righteousness, to protect those worthy and virtuous,
To overcome and destroy the evil-doers.*

Guru Gobind Singh had set himself against oppression and intolerance. He did not fight for any territory or worldly power, nor against any religion or sect. Among his admirers and followers of Islam had aligned themselves with him against the imperial armies. Two of the sons of Pīr Buddhū Shāh, a Muslim divine, and a number of his disciples sacrificed their lives in the battle of Bhangānī fighting on the Guru's side. The Muslim ruler of Mālerkotlā, Nawāb Sher Muhammad Khān, had raised a strong protest against the execution of Guru Gobind Singh's two minor sons at Sirhind. Thus people of different faiths were attracted to the Guru whose teaching was that all men were equal and that, though the outer forms differed, the fundamental truth was the same everywhere.

The Sikh organization had taken on the semblance of a State during Guru Gobind Singh's days. But amidst all its splendour, he maintained puritanical standards of simplicity in his personal life. Guru Nānak had struck a gentle note, but no one could mistake its implacability towards injustice and hypocrisy. Guru Gobind Singh's response to the situation he was confronted with was in keeping with that disposition.

All the Gurus shared the same light. This belief is central to the Sikhs' understanding of their history. Guru Gobind Singh himself says in his *Bachitra Natak* : "He who knoweth this reality [of the Ten Gurus being one entity] captureth the truth. Without knowing this, one remaineth in illusion." Bhāi Nand Lal, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, perceived this truth and sang in his Persian couplets :

Nānak is the same, as is Angad. The same is the virtuous and glorious Amar Dās, Rām Dās is also the same, the same is Arjan. The same is the noble and excellent. Hargobind, the same is Har Rāi to whom are transparent this world and the next. The same is exalted Har Krishan who fulfilleth the desire of every luckless one. The same is also Guru Tegh Bahādur. From the same light is Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh is the same as Nānak.

Guru Nānak has been a continuing reality, an abiding pressing. All succeeding Gurus bore witness to this fact; so did the community which was developing under their care. Of this subtle relationship and the pervasive influence of Guru Nānak there is interesting contemporary

testimony which authenticates the Sikh belief that all the Ten Gurus embodied the same light and worked for the implementation of truths revealed by the First, Guru Nānak. This belief is not a matter of reading history backwards. As has been mentioned by Sattā and Balwand, minstrels contemporary of the Second, Third and Fourth Gurus, they sang in verse, preserved in the Guru Granth, of Guru Nānak's revelation manifesting itself in the successors. This is exactly how Bhāi Gurdas a contemporary of the Fifth Guru, perceived the phenomenon of spiritual succession in the forming Sikh tradition.

Mobid Zulfiqār Ardistānī, a contemporary of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Gurus, lends authenticity to the testimony of Bhāi Gurdās and his predecessors and specifically refers to the current Sikh belief that he who recognizes not Guru Arjan the same as Guru Nānak apostatizes himself.

Guru Gobind Singh himself wrote in *Bachitra Nānak*, "Nānak assumed the body of Angad Afterwards, Nānak was called Amar Dās, as one lamp is lit from another....The holy Nānak was revered as Angad. Angad was recognized as Amar Dās. And Amar dās became Rām Dās.... When Rām Dās was blended with the Divine, he gave the Guruship to Arjan. Arjan appointed Hargobind in his place and Hargobind gave his seat to Har Rāi. Har Krishan, his son, then became Guru. After him came Tegh Bahādur."

This oneness, this unity of the Gurus came home to the Sikhs through their belief in the presence of Guru Nānak in them. For the Gurus themselves, this presence was a constant reality, an inspiration and the norm in the exercise of their spiritual office. They wrote sacred verse in the name of the First Guru. All their hymns in the Guru Granth bear the *nom de plume* of Nānak. Thus we have the compositions of Nānak I, Nānak II, Nānak III, and so on. They have a remarkable correspondence of tone and concept; in both utterance and deed later Gurus, Nānaks themselves as the Sikhs believe, were acting out the intuition received from Guru Nānak.

The memory of Guru Nānak was in this manner operative in subsequent Sikh development. The interplay of the original impulse and the exigencies of contemporary historical environment set the course of this evolution. Challenges arose. New situations demanded, and elicited, new answers. Points of transfiguration were reached and worked out; yet it is possible to discern in this process a basic harmony and continuity attributable primarily to the ever-present Nānak legend. Each of the successor-Gurus contributed towards the evolution of the creed and the civil organization of the community in accordance with the spirit of the teaching inherited from Guru Nanak and the existing historical factors.

Guru Gobind Singh sealed the line of personal Gurus and passed on the succession to the Holy Granth, the Guru Granth. He declared to the

Sikhs at the time of his demise that the Word as embodied in the Granth would be the Guru after him. "The Guru's spirit," said he, "will henceforth be in the Granth and Khālsā. Where the Granth is with any five Sikhs as representing the Khālsā, there will the Guru be."

For Sikhs the Guru Granth has since been the Guru. Through it Guru Nānak lives on in the Sikh faith and tradition as a reality transcending time and space. This awareness of the continuing presence of Guru Nānak has been of crucial importance to the Sikh community as a whole as well as to its members individually. It has been an impelling factor in their history and has given them unity and a sense of purpose. Singly and in groups they practise this presence daily when in their homes and in the congregations in the *gurdwārās*, they conclude their morning and evening prayers or prayer said at another time as part of personal piety or of a ceremony with the words: *Nānak nām charhdī kalā; tere bhāne sarbatt kā bhalā*—In Nānak's name we pray !May Thy name, Thy glory, O God, be ever in the ascendant, and, in Thy Will, may peace and happiness come to one and all in the world !!

INNER DYNAMICS OF SIKH CULTURE

ATTAR SINGH

The great twentieth century Indian mystic visionary Aurobindo Ghosh in one of his profound enquiries into the soul of Indian Culture entitled: *The Foundation of Indian Culture and the Renaissance In India*, made a pointed reference to the order of Khalsa as one of the two remarkable creations which, "embodied in the period of disintegration the last effort of the Indian political mind to form the foundations of a new life under the old conditions," the other being that of the Mahratta revival. Of the two, Aurobindo seems to be more favourably impressed by the Sikh Khalsa which according to him, "was an astonishingly original and novel creation," most probably because, "its face was turned not to the past but to the future." He very generously concedes that, "Apart and singular in its theocratic head and democratic soul and structure, its profound spiritual beginning, its first attempt to combine the deepest elements of Islam and Vedanta, it was a premature drive towards an entrance into the third or spiritual stage of human society." What he laments, however, is that the Sikh Khalsa "could not create between the spirit and the external life, the transmitting medium of a rich creative thought and culture." To conclude, Aurobindo Ghosh argued that, "Thus hampered and deficient it began and ended within narrow local limits, achieved intensity but no power of expansion."

Any discerning student will not miss in this appraisal the note of a grudging though indulgent admiration for the role of Sikhism so typical of the approach of the modern protagonists of the ancient Indian cultural heritage towards the entire movement of Medieval Indian cultural renaissance, inspired and begotten by Bhakti, Sant, Sufi and Sikh movements. This becomes apparent when Sri Aurobindo perceives the medieval period of Indian history as one of decline rather than resurgence and describes it as that of "disintegration", "restruction", and "decadence". The reason is not far to seek and writings of Sri Aurobindo himself provide the cue. Even while conceding some spurt of life and aspiration to various expressions of medieval Indian renaissance he appears to define or, shall we say, dismiss all the cultural progress registered in the fields of religion, ethics, political and social thought, art, architecture, devotional and secular

poetry and music as popular, a term, which with him carries a distinct pejorative connotation and implies a fall from the olympian heights of perfection which had already been scaled during the classical age. The fact of the matter is that the vitality and vigour of all the varied movements was derived from the urges and aspirations of a doubly alienated people for a new order and they all articulate undisguised dissent, protest and even revolt, against the empty formalism and the sterile traditionalism to which their parent faiths, had been reduced. In their quest for regeneration of man the medieval Indian mystics, Sufis, Saints and poets were essentially motivated by a desire to evolve an alternative culture, that of the people characterised by an emphasis on experience rather than speculation, spontaneity rather than discipline, vigour rather than stylization, change rather than continuity and innovation rather than repetition. Naturally such a culture could not but come into confrontation with the normative, traditionalist and juridical culture of the elite, preserved, promoted and administered through the formalist priestly classes. Quite obviously the comments of Sri Aurobindo indicate that even though the sharp edges of the confrontation between the exponents of the elitist cultural traditions and those of the new democratic urges and aspirations have been considerably blunted, the old scars still survive. Here it will be pertinent to submit that while most of the movements fell victim to the inexorable law of "a revolutionary outburst and final surrender to orthodoxy," deciphered by D.P. Mukherjee in his study of the Sociology of the medieval Indian culture, Sikhism escaped that fate by institutionalizing its distinctiveness by graduating from the status of a quasi Hindu sect to a separate Religion. By opting for credal autonomy, Sikhism also had to be content with a localized individuality as against an amorphous universality.

Of course, the most obvious aspect of the emergence and spread of Sikh faith remains that this dynamic new religion got confined to a very small segment of Indian people. Even in Punjab, the land of their birth, the Sikhs did not count for more than two percent of its total population on the eve of its partition in 1947. It was quite natural that such a glaring phenomenon should attract notice. For Arnold Toynbee the reason lay in transformation, even though for understandable if also not wholly valid reason, of Sikh faith from the quietist and mystical vision into a militant order. By stretching the argument of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, it should be possible to make it fit into the frame of reference adopted by Toynbee, in spite of the fact that the drift of the latter's reasoning is unmistakably towards attributing to distinctive features of Sikhism only a negative role in its historical career, while the former's complaint is that these distinctive features, if any, could not bear forth a distinct Sikh culture.

Involved as both these approaches are with rationalization of the

historical situation of the Sikhs they are apt to detract from the more important question of the uniqueness of the Sikhism as a faith which informed the creative aspirations and the practical lives of the people. Of course, there are several other historical reasons for Sikh religion not spreading as widely as some other religions. But Sikh faith did give rise to a distinctive culture which still retains quite a good deal of its original vitality and dynamism.

Broadly speaking, the Sikh faith established its distinctive identity from the very start as a movement aimed at redeeming the humanity from the state of spiritual and moral decadence into which it had fallen because of the super-imposition on the lives of the people of a constantly alienating religious, social and political authoritarianism. It is indeed remarkable that in its own understanding of its divine and historical role, Sikhism quite early in its career related these to the religious, social and political situations of the times. Guru Nanak Dev, Bhai Gurdas and Guru Gobind Singh have in their writings made recurrent references to this situation as arising from a moral and social crisis which could be resolved only by making fresh beginnings. The foreigner elitist structure and the rapacious character of the Indian polity foisted on the people by the successive Sultanate regimes and their successor Mughal empire, the hierarchical division of the static Indian society without any impulse from within and impetus from without or a mechanism for social mobility, and the empty ritualism and clericalism to which the great faiths of the Hindus and the Muslims had deteriorated, because of their inner decay, all these factors combined to divest the common man of a sense of identity and moral purpose.

The atmosphere of insecurity and utter helplessness that comes alive in countless contemporary mystical verses and the overall tragic overtones of the religious and aesthetic sensibility of that age. The two great mystical movements of medieval India, the Bhakti and the Sufi, achieved a major breakthrough in articulating the quest of the age for a new spiritual anchor. It was the search for a God who could liberate man from his miserable destiny of woes and tears, lift the mark of the outcaste and restore the lowliest of the lowly to their true human stature. Ravidas, a notable 15th century saint, has given a vivid image of this quest.

My Lord! who else will perform such a miracle!

Protector of the poor, My Lord bestows highest of the honour on the
lowliest of the low.

Even those whose touch pollutes the world are worthy of your grace.

My Lord not afraid of anyone,

He dissolves the mark of birth and lifts the low into high
positions.

It is in this search for a new God that entire religious quest of

Sikhism is situated. The Sikh Gurus went beyond articulating the need for a new God, they gave a tangible shape to the intellectual and practical pursuits of their followers. An analysis of the Sikh concept of God reveals that above all He is made relevant to the human situation and all the major life concerns of man whether spiritual or temporal. Embedded as it is in the striving of the disinherited and the alienated for a meaning in life, the Sikh faith made a bold attempt, indeed, at releasing God from theological and denominational disputations and integrating him with man's inner drive for self-discovery and self-realization. By visualizing a Divinity transcending all its accepted manifestations whether as incarnation (Avtars, Lord Rama, Lord Krishna et al.), revelations (holy Books, *Vedas* *Quran* etc.) or faiths (religious or mystical orders), the Sikh Gurus demolished the concept of finality of any particular religious vision and claims of any particular religious vision and claims of any particular people as the chosen people or of any specific path as the only path to salvation. To say this is not to imply that Sikhism rejected Islam or Hinduism or projected itself in any opposition to them. On several occasions the Sikh Gurus have exhorted the followers of these religions to search beyond the outer forms for the inner substance of their faiths, so as to be better Hindus or Muslims. Purifying the religious vision of the gross matter that it invariably attracts through its course in history and restoring it to its original simplicity and sense of wonder was, indeed, the task that the Sikh Gurus chose for themselves. This was a truly revolutionary step in the religious history of man. Its significance lies, apart from other things, in laying the foundations for a Republic of Man's Religions. The fact of the matter is that the spiritual freedom of man from all types of traditionalism such as particularism, ritualism, clericalism and denominationalism is the true basis for a sane and cultured society. In the closed society of medieval India where religious conformism was further strengthened by the severest of the state authoritarianism and tensions ensuing from conflicts of faiths threatened either to tear apart the society or to reduce man to the status of a boneless miracle, this new vision betokened the aspiration for a free, non-conformist, multi-central, plural society, which alone could provide man with fullest freedom for his creative evolution. The terror of the despotic state compounded with the deadening demands made of men by the religious traditionalism played a devastating role in alienating man from his divine estate. In Sikhism is crystallized the response the disinherited and the alienated to this situation which was drying up the moral and spiritual reservoirs of humanity. The successive Sikh Gurus raised their powerful voices in favour of integrity of the individual and against the oppressive state, the corrupt church, the inhumane social organization and the insensitivity of an indifferent people through whose pusillanimity the former flourished.

It may be worthwhile to remember that by diverting the spiritual concerns of man from religious particularism and formalism or mystical beliefs, the Sikh Gurus attempted neither the diminishing of the quest for the sacred nor depriving the divine mystery of its inherent majesty. On the other hand they underlined the tremendous mystery of God as the Ultimate and the Beyond.

What is remarkable, however, is that the faith in the Ultimate and the Beyond arises not from rejection of the reality of Man. The Sikh faith starts with acceptance of man with all his failings and imperfections and seeks to elevate him to the spiritual heights of god-hood. In its approaches both to God and Man, the Sikh faith is inspired by a desire to relate both of them to each other in an ever-evolving mutuality. This elevates man's religious quest to a new spiritual status; not of an imitator but of an innovator and creator. This spirit of unending seeking, discovery and innovation, which is central to Sikh faith, is derived to a no mean extent from a realization of a new urgency of Time as an important factor in the destiny of man. By bringing Time into focus in all aspects of creator and destroyer on the one hand and of situation, memory and dream on the other, Guru Gobind Singh asserted the dynamic truth of change as a fact of life which man has not to accept and suffer but to master and employ in the task of his self-realization. It will be quite relevant to point out here that Guru Gobind Singh makes a deliberate distinction between God and religion with all its details of prophets, rituals, church organizations, etc. He places God outside the category of time, as Akāl (the timeless), while shows up all the paths to God and messengers or prophets of God as having emerged in time and therefore subject to its inexorable laws.

Thus we have seen that the distinguishing marks of the Sikh faith are : (i) a concern not only for man's salvations hereafter but of his freedom here and now also, (ii) a commitment to a non-conformist way of life which alone suits all the aspirations of man whether spiritual, metaphysical, social or political, and (iii) a demand from such a free man in such a free society for engagement with the life processes as a participant in their unfolding and evolution. Obviously such an understanding of the human situation should entail a great release and transformation of spiritual energy. That precisely is the point for new beginnings in cultural evolution.

The Sikh concept of man in its relationship with the Divine played a significant role in imparting to the Sikh culture its distinct identity. Dr Hew McLeod has very pertinently analysed the Sikh understanding of the human situation as related to the spiritual exhaustion of the unregenerate man. The source of all evil according to Sikh view of life lies neither outside the divine in the form of the devil, the Satan or anti-Christ, nor outside the man in the form of a hostile nature. The Sikh Gurus perceived

evil as a factor inherent in the human situation itself. It lies dormant in man and awakens when he is cut off from his spiritual and moral moorings and can be contained only through constant struggle of man for realization of God through self-awareness and self-realization. Ignorance, sloth and lust are the agents of evil. But above all it is manifestation of contradiction between percept and practice, between profession and deeds. The Sikh faith, therefore, lays greater stress upon the integration of man through the dynamic principles of relatedness of his practical life to the spiritual quest, active participation in the drama of life as a whole. In that context it could be asserted that the Sikh faith does not conceive of a God to descend from above, but on the other hand of one to emerge from within the man. That is why the longing for God in Sikh scriptures is tempered with the aspiration after God in man. That precisely is the reason for the emphasis shifting from devotion and gnosis to praxis, i.e. from worship or knowledge of God to achievement of God through practical living. Apparently this concept of man becoming God is closely related to a way of life to which eternal quest, enterprise and striving are central. I need not go into the practical manner in which Sikh view of life has shaped the attitude and the behaviour pattern of the Sikhs as a whole. After all, achievement of spiritual heights cannot be divorced from struggle for achievement of a more humane and just world.

It will be quite relevant to recall here the state of unregenerate and uncultured man as conceived by Guru Nanak and its transformation into a fully awakened soul as conceived by Guru Gobind Singh. The most significant point of contrast between the two is the deadness of mind soul in the unregenerate state and intellectual sharpness and spiritual illumination of the fully awakened soul. In its highest reaches, Sikhism strives for a new type of man as an agent of God working himself out in history. This man is quite different from the pious man or the saintly man on which the Indian religious practice laid greatest emphasis. The new man of Sikh conception was charged with the zeal of creating a new world order.

In the context of man's spiritual endeavour, Sikhism postulated three closely inter-related but quite independent goals for the man on the path to self-realization. The Sikh Gurus have repeated again and again that the Sikh quest is neither for power nor for glory. This quest is identified as one for : (i) Truth (*Sati*), (ii) Freedom (*Mukti*) and (iii) Reintegration with self and God (*Sanjog*). The three respective states which constitute the points of departure are those of (i) Bondage (*Bandhan*), (ii) Falsehood and delusion (*Koor*, *Bharam*) and (iii) alienation (*Vijog*). The process of spiritual regeneration of man begins with dissolution of delusion and the upsurge of inner enlightenment. Recognition of truth leads to freedom which precedes reintegration. Notwithstanding the significance of divine

grace of God in all these pre-occupations of man for his self-realization, the Sikh faith never allows man's own constant striving and endeavour to get out of focus. In this background it should be quite clear that the major concern of Sikh faith has been with seeking a new orientation of relationship between man and God, man and society and man's secular needs and spiritual aspirations. Their inter-relatedness to each other is the realm of a Sikh's quest and struggle. By being inter-related to each other they hold the human world in balance. Cut off from one another the one becomes too ethereal to be of any practical meaning for man and the other too gross to provide any mental or spiritual satisfaction. Guru Nanak Dev, therefore, commends the path of golden mean.

Elevated to such great spiritual heights the Sikh view of life demanded a rigorous spiritual discipline which cannot, by its very nature, be common-place. Discarding of popular religious practices and rituals, such as routine recitation of scriptures, customary ablutions and baths in the sacred tanks and rivers, pilgrimages to holy places, worship of graves and mausoleums, observation of taboos and mechanical customs begotten by traditional religion, such as discrimination between man and man on the basis of caste and creed or difference in station in life, is germane to the essential vision of Sikh faith. By establishing the supremacy of personal merit in affairs both temporal and spiritual, Sikhism allows for fullest flowering of human personality. Sikh faith does not recognize any aristocracy of birth or privilege. It believes in a spiritual democracy which affords equal opportunities to everyone to emerge to his fullest stature by sheer merit alone. By making man responsible not only for his own salvation but also for that of his fellow-men, Sikhism casts a heavy weight on the shoulders of man. But by this very process it also resolved the contradictions between the individual and the collective through his solidarity with his fellow-beings. In this overall perspective we can say that Sikh faith accepts the reality of man and fashions out of it the means for his transforming and transcending it. The contingent and transitory character of this reality is too obvious to be neglected but Sikhism believes it to be inherently capable of participating in the attributes of the necessary by regaining the touch of the eternal and the true of which it is one of the creations and manifestations.

From the foregoing it should be clear that the Sikh Gurus from the very start envisaged Sikhism in distinction from and not opposition to other faiths of men. Sikhism was conceived as a faith aimed at resolving contradictions born of divisions and schisms in the human society on the one hand and the inner disintegration of man on the other. This new vision found expression in various acts and events of history as also in Sikh arts, numinous poetry, architecture, music, painting etc. In all these there is not only blending and orchestration of different motifs but there also is a

quality of flight towards the beyond. The basic Sikh idiom is that of transcendence, of rising above, of striving ahead, of reaching past. Whether one envisions the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and countless of their followers till recent times, or the hymns of Sikh Gurus fired with the divine passion, or the Golden Temple emerging as flower from a tank of water, or the blending of music and message in Sikh *Kirtan* (community singing) rising heavenwards in prayer, one finds all these varied facets of Sikhism imbued with the same idiom of transcendence. The laying of foundation of Golden Temple by a Muslim divine, the incorporation of teachings of saints of all castes and creeds alongwith the compositions of the Sikh Gurus themselves in the Guru Granth, testify to the same quality of self-transcendence which informs other innumerable deeds of valour and feats of the creative act.

Once the two distinctive features of Sikhism, search for the universal reality of God beyond particularism, clericalism, ritualism, denominationalism, and acceptance of the immediacy of the human situation are grasped, it is easier to appreciate some of the most significant features of Sikh culture. In all its aspects, devotional, mystical, theological or intellectual and aesthetic, Sikh culture is essentially action-oriented and not merely cerebral or speculative. All the major concerns of man to which Sikhism assigned the greatest urgency, i.e. truth, freedom and reintegration do ask for cognition, continuing interpretation and clarification and constant correlation to the practical problems of humanity, but more than that they demand an active engagement, unflinching commitment and unrelenting struggle to be actualized and made meaningful. This latter element has imbued all different expressions of Sikh culture with a democratic spirit. Sikh culture is not a class culture. It emerges from the process of moral and spiritual regeneration of man which is a solemn undertaking of Sikh faith, and begins with acculturation of common men and women.

In his *magnum opus* "A Study of History" Arnold Toynbee making a comparative observation about the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh and the Russian Communist Party as fashioned by Lenin as instruments of the collective aspirations and will of the respective communities, has surmised that the former anticipated the latter by at least two centuries. There is great merit in this suggestion. But in his appraisal of Sikh Culture, Arnold Toynbee has missed one essential point. From the very start Sikhism has evolved as a movement of continuing revolution which visualized State as an unmitigated evil. Product as it was of the socio-historical conditions of medieval India, Sikhism very early in its career started crystalizing the sense of alienation of the common men and women from the alien state superimposed on a subject race.

Any proper evaluation of the *leitmotif* of the Sikh culture will have to

account for the Sikh approach to the feudal institution of the king as the symbol and the repository of the State power. In medieval India the king was conceived as the reflection of God, (*Zil-i-illahi*). A major contribution of Sikh culture to the history of ideas lay in anticipating the modern theories of state as a purely secular institution and not sacred and of divine origin. As if to underscore the essential human and hence transient character of the kingship, Sikh culture posited the idea of the true king (*Sacha Patshah*), the title with which it invested its core concept of Godhead. Incorporated in the corpus of Sikh scriptures is a hymn of Kabir which avers : "No king measures up to the grandeur of God. The worldly kings hold their sway temporarily and indulge in evil deeds."

Guru Nanak further enunciates this argument by bringing out in bold relief the brutality, corruption and inhuman conduct of the kings and their minions. The typical images in which Guru Nanak realized his responses to the rulers, the officials, and their lackeys are almost invariably drawn from the world of predatory animals fattening themselves on the suffering, loot and plunder of the innocent masses; who fall an easy prey like lambs to the whims and caprice of the wild lions in the jungle. Guru Gobind Singh in expounding his philosophy of history in the prefatory verses of the *Bachittar Natak* has drawn pointed attention to the corrupting and perverting influence of the unchallenged power.

It is to be noted that the Sikh faith did not come into conflict with the Mughal imperialism just accidentally but as a direct consequence of its ideological orientation as the support and the refuge of the suffering humanity, of the poor and the helpless. It is in this connection that the resolve of Guru Gobind Singh to train those destitute and lowly people into the art of statecraft who never knew any human dignity either by their birth or their caste, becomes meaningful. Another important consequence of this anti-feudal and anti-elitist understanding of historical situation was the Sikh belief that the sovereignty vested not with the kings but with God and the Sikh commitment that it was to be transferred unmediated by the kings to the people. Whatever other cultural consequences of Sikhism, its influence is clearly at work in the weakening of feudal relation of land holding and social and political ascendancy of the middle peasant and artisan castes in Punjab. Banda Bahadur anticipated the land-to-the-tiller slogan of today over two centuries ago. The socio-economic prosperity of Punjab is to a great extent to be attributed to the social revolution wrought by the Sikh Gurus through their gospel of the manual work.

As a matter of fact, anti-feudalism is as much a part of Sikh intellectual and cultural tradition as anti-traditionalism, anti-clericalism and anti-particularism. While summing up his account of the historical evolution of Sikh faith, Giani Gian Singh, the celebrated author of the

Panth Prakash, makes no bones about the perversion of Sikh vision as a consequence of the establishment of the feudal Sikh state under Ranjit Singh. His sense of elation at the Sikh people entering into the mainstream of history under the leadership of Ranjit Singh does not preclude from his awareness of the inexorable process the moral degradation, oppression and suppression of the common people and perversion of the Sikh ideals of moral commitment, humanitarianism and democracy, which was inbuilt in any scheme of things supplanting Muslim feudalism with its Sikh variant. Similarly the struggle for freedom of the Sikh people of the native states in British India governed by the Sikh chiefs under the banner of Riasti Akali Dal drew its moral justification as much from the new liberal ideas of the West as from the renewal of the essential Sikh political attitudes, especially its susceptibility for radicalism and revolutionary politics ranging from Bharat Naujwan Sabha of Shaheed Bhagat Singh to the Naxalite activism in recent times, is possible without relating it to the elements of social criticism, dissent and protest which were nurtured by the tradition as an integral part of its religious ministry.

The democratic spirit of Sikh culture manifests itself in whatsoever detail of it one may confront. Its essential mode is not of excluding and casting off but of drawing in, blending and assimilation. The canonization of saints and scriptures, the first step towards organization of Sikh church itself is an outstanding example of this assertion. The process of Sikh canonization drew in men of God of different faiths and their writings in divergent languages, belonging to the entire spectrum of Indian caste system and hailing from different regions. The institution of *langar* (community kitchen) which elevates the daily necessity of cooking and eating to the level of religious sacrament was another integrative agent. In a society where cooking and eating had got mixed up with the notions of personal piety and caste pollution, the experience of getting together of people, without any considerations of caste or creed not only to participate in arranging the cooking and serving of meals but also in eating together in the same row must have been and still remain a great liberating force.

Similarly, the tradition of Sikh poetry was multi-lingual and evolved through blending together of classical and folk thematic and formal patterns through all sorts of innovations and experimentation in diction, prosody and symbolism. The breaking through of the day to day concerns of men into the metaphysical speculation and mystical flights imparts to the sacred hymns an astonishing freshness and reality. In its overall orientation Sikh poetry projects investing of devotional frenzy with spiritual aspiration, mystical and metaphysical insights with a moving lyricism and heroic inspiration with moral fervour. The preference for the spoken as against the classical languages as the vehicle for the divine

message proved to be a catalyst of a great cultural consequence. It provided the common people with their tongue to say in which they could formulate their true feelings and articulate their aspirations apart from bestowing a new dignity upon these languages as the media for cultural exchange. The Sikh mysticism made up more for the loss of esotericism by a poignant lyricism which is redolent alike of tender love and passionate devotion.

One can only faintly perceive the grand design unfolding itself behind this multi-linguistic and multi-traditional activity. A clear perception of the earliest manifestation of that design is available in the *Guru Granth Sahib* (compiled in 1604 A.D.) which was conceived by Guru Arjan Dev as a compendium of the religious insights of the Indian people embracing the hymns of people of all creeds and faiths, a fact which because of its radical espousal of the ideas of religious co-existence and mutual understanding, its variety of linguistic and literary styles and its upholding of the human dignity without any consideration of caste or class, lends it a significance unparalleled in the religio-literary history of the Indian people. It can truly be described as the most exciting embodiment of the highest reaches of human freedom in that dark age of the closed feudal society.

Innovation and experimentation did not stop with ideas alone. The Sikh architecture, especially the Sikh temple, enshrines the Buddhist idea of a lotus in a pool of pure water and the Islamic austerity and functional utility in an organic unity. The Sikh architecture flourished by eschewing abstract decorative motifs and blending together of a robust functionalism and a profound symbolism into an inspiring and totally satisfying style. In Sikh devotional music a deliberate cross-fertilization of classical formalism with folk tunes was attempted with a view to creating a new form and musical idiom suitable for mass participation. Sikh *kirtan* today is the richest form of *Artha Sangit* defined by D.P. Mukerjee as music with meaning, with its insistence upon the emotional and poetic value of the words, and it succeeded not only in affording the joy of music equally to the initiated and the uninitiated but also in tempering the abstraction and austerity of classical music with the vigour and fervour of the ennobling message.

Sikh culture today is facing a two-fold challenge : of secularization and modernization on the one hand and of entering into a meaningful relationship with the emergent world culture on the other. In a sense, in this predicament Sikh culture has to tackle the same problems which are confronting all traditional cultures. Greater opportunities for inter-cultural exchange have forced various living cultures of the world to redefine themselves. The basic question suggesting itself to all of them remains whether they can retain their distinctive identities and yet aspire towards the universality of spirit which inspires the idea of a world culture.

Although some serious students of Sikh culture have tried to put a question mark over its capacity to survive, some recent developments and trends point unmistakably towards the opposite direction. It is to be hoped that the Sikh *elan* will display the same innovative and creative impulses in the task of its coming to terms with the contemporary realities and the most uncertain future, which it originally brought forth in facing the historical challenges attending upon its birth and evolution.

THE SIKH PEOPLE

PURAN SINGH

Needless to repeat history which, to those who do not sympathise with us, means little. To those who do, every page of Sikh history is an inexhaustible inspiration.

But in its last 400 odd years the Sikhs as a people have shown a peerless spirit of martyrdom for Truth.

Cunningham and others who have written on the Sikh people, have seen a new nation of men in India who were welded together by the genius of the Guru into a spiritual brotherhood whose ideals of art, religion, life and labour were different from all those that had passed. The Sikh people, unlike other peoples of India, are a race of straightforward men of action, whose simple minds, informed of the Eternal by the Guru, shrinks from the idle speculation of the Brahminical mind, and also shrinks from the too theological law of the Muslim, at least of the empire-building Islam so hungry of conquering people (perhaps not the true Islam of the Prophet), and lives the simple, austere life of incessant labour that characterizes the tiller of soil everywhere. They have an inventive genius and love the practical pursuits of life—agriculture, tool-making, and engineering. They are, as a people, fond of colonization. Given opportunities and modern education, this nation has potentialities of progress which no other set of people India possesses in so remarkable a degree.

Four hundred years ago the inhabitants of the Punjab were all slaves. The invaders that came by the Khyber Pass destroyed by the sword all Indian hopes of ever becoming a self-governing nation. Foreign invasions showed the hollowness of the creed that was holding the people of India in its clutches of caste and colour and dual differences. What could the invaders have achieved if the will to die for freedom were there in the soul of India? Then the Mughals settled down, Akbar became a Brahmin, Aurangzeb a mere dreamer of a Muslim Empire, and Bahadur Shah a stringer of rhymes that the dancing girls sang.

Islam with its sword has found its grave in India. What is the Indian Mussalman today but a Hindu who hates "Others?" Perhaps in the whole of India today, one cannot find a group that can so continuously suffer for an ideal as the Sikhs.

There is no spontaneously divine personality left in India, except by most laborious and painful efforts and penances and sadhanas. What wearisome life-long penance the Hindu saint has to go through to earn sainthood ! If godliness is to be attained at that cost, it does not seem to be worth it. Such laboured cultivation of personality indicates that the Hindu India is decadent—perhaps facing decline from within !

It is, therefore, wonderful that in this dark environment of hovering and lingering death, the Sikh has managed to exist and to make an impact on history. He is not intellectually subtle like the Hindu, he is not stuffed with "knowledge" and, let us say, he has not yet understood his own inner culture fully, but he is alive. This is hopeful. He loves his Gurus, the Masters. As the song of Marseilles thrills the whole French nation, so do the tunes that come out of the Guru's soul thrill the Sikh people; this response is the sign of life. If a whole people were ever fired by the vital spirituality of a prophet's song, here is the example of the Sikhs of the Punjab. They never enquire into the meaning of the poetry of the Guru, to them it is music in which words mean the "blessed mood" of inspiration. Out of the down-trodden, oppressed, lifeless slaves of the Punjab, Guru Gobind Singh moulded a nation which has in it the potentialities of a progressive nation of men. In the whole of India, the Sikh nation is the brightest spot still which has an inexhaustible will to die for the love of its ideals. It is remarkable that this burning idealism is not based on land, or country or clan pride, but on the personal love of the Guru. When they are called upon, the Sikhs seek death as moths seek light. Guru Gobind Singh cut the moorings of this nation from its racial past and a nation wholly modern in spirit and mind sprang up out of the Guru's mind, with a highly inspiring and most deeply reactive tradition and history of its own. And it is very strange that when a Sikh is baptised, he feels a new life come to him, as if the Guru still lives and sends in one glance a wave of life and inspiration. They have potentialities yet. They love art and artistic labour more than metaphysical inanities. It is refreshing to see a Sikh carpenter deeply absorbed in his labour and a Brahmin anointing images with *tilaks* and mumbling texts !

Their inheritance from the Guru of the spontaneous practice of goodness, spontaneous practice of self-sacrifice, spontaneous practice of love for all creation, for the sake of the Guru, and their natural courtesies resulting from spontaneous manly love, not by a discipline of vows and penances, are the essential humanities of the Khalsa. Their preaching is not abstractions but life. They believe in developing a magnetic presence which should proclaim them and not mere lip-philosophies. Religiosity is not what appeals to them.

The Gurus, the Masters started their religion with a casteless kitchen. The first need of man is bread. When fed, and fed well, he needs the

support that is for his life in the innocent smiles of wife and children, in the kindness of a mother, in the intense self-sacrifice of a sister. And this constitutes the second step of their creed in providing themselves with a healthy, harmonious home, and their creed has a "sweet home" to live in. And they are all so attracted inwardly to Him, that his Name is their inward joy of life. And their spontaneous willingness to die for Him, is unique. They feel Him living with them in their soul and in their homes. Without Him indwelling and inspiring them, they think life is but a "chemical process of combustion". And when this feeling for the Guru throbs continuously like the heart, in an individual, in a whole commune, then they are Sikhs and only then.

One can understand that their shrines, with the song of the Guru enthroned therein, could not tolerate any pageant merely of academic and empty-hearted worship. Worship of the Song (*shabad*) is filling to one's throat, heart and head. It is impregnating oneself with the spirit of the Holy Ghost. One can understand their bowing down their heads in the sacred memory of the Guru to the "Song Enthroned". And they are right in calling their book 'Guru' Granth. It is the voice that rings in their soul. It is the Person of the Guru reduced to the living seed of song. The Sikh himself, due to the ancient philosophy in his blood and bone has not yet understood the immortal significance of Word-worship, Song-worship as worship of the Guru.

The Sikh was made to be a feast-giver on the roadside, to spend as the day ended, all he earned daily; and it is his self-degeneration if he accumulates and thinks of the morrow. The very thought of the morrow for a Sikh, and "Who will support us when we are ill and unable to earn?" is irreligious. To a true Sikh, death is better than security earned with dishonesty. And the Sikh life, inspired with the ideals of the Guru, can be nothing else. The Sikh can have no thought for the morrow. The more creative a Sikh is, the greater is his distribution on the roadsides of life and as long as he has anything in hand, all must come and those who need, bear it away. His giving away of his labour and love is like the lamp distributing light, like the rose distributing its fragrance. A Sikh's spontaneous and natural function of life is such; otherwise he is not a true Sikh. The Gurus showed that the true sympathy of man for man is only an effect of a high and true spiritual culture, an inward lyrical silence of love, an inspired inward elevation of the soul, and it would be the natural state of society where his Sikhs are. Inward elevation is all; both intellect and will must be the agencies to continue that state of elevation from the spiritual to the physical.

What most significant in Sikh society is that like trees, they keep their vision and word beneath their bark and stand in themselves, suggesting through their life and labour the glorious vision of their

creators. The Tenth Guru, while condemning the various creeds as having degenerated into different narrow-minded sects, forgetting the great godly scheme of things of uniting men with Nature and God, of bringing happiness to mankind, declares love as the sole means of attainment of God. This love is silent, manifesting itself in the service of mankind. The Guru insists that religion is a thing which should invigorate the roots, it is not concerned with the surface. Lip worship causes schisms, down with it, down with the life of false religiosity.

The culture of mere intellect and will is of the valley, the Nām culture of the Guru is a thing of the high snow-peaks and low lands. Sikh culture is recognition of the perpetual Divine gift and perennial creativeness. The joy of a true Sikh is a kind deed done, a tear shed, a loaf of bread baked for another, and once even in twenty-four hours, the face turned upward, bathing in the light of the Guru's grace. And all truth is self-realised in the inspired spontaneity of the feelings for the beloved beautiful, in a lyrical repetition of the Guru's Song and Name with a sweet aching caused by the disciple's personal love for the Guru who is his gateway to God.

As usual, the world is too inert, too late to welcome its prophets who bring an altogether new message. So it has been with the Sikh Guru. The Hindus just condescended with a superior air to say that the Sikhs are of them—"born out of them". Culturally and academically and even racially this was not wrong, but inspirationally, it was an attempt to thwart all the potentialities of the Guru's universal message. The Mussalmans of the times benefitted more by the great Guru's contact; a great Sikh-Muslim school of spiritual culture had its birth in the Punjab. This school sang in Punjabi, the mother-tongue of the people and gave up the Persian and Arabic foreignness of accent and alienness of idea. For, Guru Nanak told Mussalmans of the times that they were false to the original spirit of Islam of the Prophet. He pitched himself against the Hindu Yogis who passed off a drunken stupor of mind as true religion. He condemned the ethical theatricality of the Jains. He vitalized decaying centres of human consciousness with his lyrical presence. He gave the song to the people which cured their soul with the music of the Infinite. He was the embodied Truth to the masses and he emancipated the mind of the masses who were so long oppressed by impossible creeds.

After the Buddha, it was the Gurus who for the first time championed the cause of the masses in caste-ridden India. The rich aristocracy and the degraded priests of the Hindus and the Muslims did not listen to him, but the oppressed people followed him with joy. He made a whole people throb with love and life. For more than a century and a half his message was secretly flaming in the bosom of the people when the genius of Guru Gobind Singh gave them the eternal shape of the Disciples, the Khalsa.

Humble labourers while digging the earth, while ploughing, were in

deep union with the God of Humanity. A new spiritual culture was being nurtured in the homes of the dust-laden peasantry of the Punjab. It was the culture of simple humanity with a Godward tendency; it was the culture of spontaneous God-head flowering in essential humanity. The God-ward tendency—being Gurmukh, with face turned to the Guru—was the simple religion of the Sikh masses.

A silent, gradual effortless effort to seek its own perfection through love and labour became the ideal of a whole race. The whole race moved round the central figure of the Guru. The Guru on this earth was the nucleus for the life of the spirit to grow around it. The Guru is the word-in-flesh, God-in-man; so it is no man, yet a man, a point where the materiality of the human body and the pure divinity of God did coalesce inextricably and indescribably in the Guru's personality. The Ten Gurus are suns round which many earths revolve. Seeing the Guru, it became impossible to distinguish man from man.

Light with the lamp is there. Guru Nanak's way of thinking is marked by a very fascinating artistic touch; he sticks a shining silver-point on a wave of sea and just shows that it is a wave, unthinkable and inseparable from the sea. Any single thought on life isolated from the infinite incomprehensible mystery-complex is but a dead concept. He ends all by saying "But he knows, he guides the destiny of creation; what can man think?"

The presence of the Sikh in the Punjab suggested a hundred known types, because he was so wholly fresh. Some thought he was a Muslim, some a Hindu, some a blend of the Hindu, some a blend of the Hindu and Mussalman. But none saw that here was after all one who combined the pristine and the modern, come to the world in hundreds and thousands. Here was a new race with a new life, a spiritual fervour, a fresh vision, with the worship of the Live Word-deity living within their hearts; here was a new nation with infinite potentialities. It was a nation that was set on voyaging into the oceans of its future. The Hindu or the Muslim past was abolished for the Sikh.

The passionate personal fealty of the Guru, the inspirer, was the secret of the power. Here came a nation of disciples in India who did after all cut clear all the tangled jungles of ancient theology, the rank and poisonous weeds of rites and castes, and lived in simple huts of their own fashioning with their minds wholly emancipated, with their labour and love wholly freed. They produced their own literature which sustained their soul. They sang while harvesting their crops; they sang while marrying away their sons and daughters, the great lyrics of Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan Dev. The Divine hymns rose from their throats as notes of the music of love, as thrills of prayer, as the voices of the unseen to bless, to console and to guide them.

The Khalsa was thus made invincible by the joy of their Guru's song; even today when they sing his Hymns in chorus of thousands of men, women, girls and boys together, one stands breathless at the immensity of the Guru's powers who put so much life in dead stones that have moved to sing of the highest liberty. They did thus successfully cut themselves off from all the past systems of thought and life. "I am neither Muslim, nor Hindu, nor Jain, nor Jew, nor Gentile. I am the man with no caste, no separate colour. My life is love. My vision is of the worlds of souls. I am bodiless, I am the soul. My religion is the person of the Guru. My tendency is Godward," said the Sikh.

Guru Gobind Singh made the Khalsa a state. He brought forth from his soul a new language for their sustenance. The word "Akali" was coined for them by the Tenth Guru. "Sat Sri Akal" is the communal cry also given by the Guru. His compositions are the eternal companions of the Khalsa, they have the deep sound of victory over death. Guru Gobind Singh exactly like Guru Nanak, almost in the same phrase dismisses all—so called religions and creeds of India as blind superstitions. Power radiates with unique effulgence.

It seems a whole room where he sat must have been filled with dazzling light; no one could see the Guru without feeling the thrill of Eternity, without an awe of that Unnameable.

The word "Akali" is no name or title, but the spirit of this whole race—the Khalsa. The Khalsa means "of God". "Akali" signifies the "Immortal Man" who has completely subjugated matter to soul. It is a flame of inspiration burning in the Disciple's breast, which leaps over death and dissolution and passes on to the future of a whole people.

The Akali-spirit is unique in its transcendental fervour, in its burning idealism, in its rustic spirit of incessant physical struggle to conquer and defeat death.

No kingdom of this earth was ever claimed by the Guru; so the spirit of the Akali was no common ignition obtained from the fire of ambition that burns in the human heart. No honour of caste, clan or blood or ancestry was prized by the Guru. The Khalsa's ancestry is from the low-lying despised people of earth. So the Akali is no spirit of noble pride like that of the Rajput, that led him to burn his women and die fighting on his own sword.

Religious fanaticism was that the Guru never allowed to enter his court. Religious superstition was eradicated from the very blood of the Sikh.

The Guru cleaved with his sword the darkness that clung and clings still to the endless philosophical hair splitting of the Hindu and the Jain.

The liberation of the human mind was the first and foremost thought of the Guru. He liberated man from the slavery of the Devas, the Vedas,

and put him to work.

Most of his disciples are even today but farmers, masons, carpenters, mechanics, and engineers.

And those that have taken to be great capitalists and chiefs have already excluded themselves from the Guru's great brotherhood of creative labour and love and death.

If the Sikh, as he was born, had ever been afforded opportunities of spiritual isolation from the rest of the world, to develop his powers of self-realization, and his instincts of art and agriculture and colonization, his would have been by now, one of the best societies of divinely inspired labourers, of saints living by the sweat of their brow.

But Brahminism was there to engulf it from within. His political temper, the result of his complete mental liberation and his passionate love of liberty pitched him against the Mughals from the time of its birth. Out of the jaws of death, if the Khalsa has still come out, there is much hope for it yet. All is not yet lost. Those Sikhs were men of great power. They were huge mountain-like personalities, out-wardly perhaps of hard and black granite, but from whom the fountains of the milk of human kindness gushed forth and went fertilizing the land. They were much too transcendently intoxicated by the "Name of God", the holy spirit of the word-in-flesh that had descended on them to be covetous of heaven or Earth. They were blessed to be such by Guru Gobind Singh in a moment of perfection. They were made great in a moment, noble by a touch, by a glance. And lighted by their examples, the common peasants of the Punjab became saints and angles, for an infinite abundance of spirit had been poured on them from the Heart of Guru Gobind Singh. What miracle can be greater than when a prophet makes other like himself? "Glory ! Glory to Guru Gobind Singh ! He and His' disciples are one !" And thus once in history came here, in this enslaved country, sincere men deeply inspired by noble and active unselfishness in great masses, who in thousands, laid down their lives in the spirit of true soldiers of God for the defence of every-thing but themselves. This makes the whole Sikh history, a unique spirit of man embodied in noble action.

"Name of God" with the Sikh is no muttering of names in an insensate jingle as with certain Indian creeds. "If by muttering some unknown God's name, man is to become free, why ! the Pudna, a bird, ever mutters *you-oo you-oo*" says Guru Gobind Singh. Their inspired activity in Sikh history is but their inward joy of God-realization gushing out of them in floods. Their heroism is akin to that of the Maid of Orleans. "Spirituality is a river in flood", says so truly the great Nietzsche. Nām is personal God carved out of the Infinite in the shape of the universe and the

Man-soul ablaze in the centre of the universe.

In Guru Gobind Singh they saw their Personal God face to face before them, and as the infant just born knows naught, so they knew not death, nor tyranny of matter and man. They had found his love, his vision, his life, his genius. And for them this was enough and for hundred of centuries yet, it would be enough.

A new language was born in the Akali camp at Anandpur, out of the poor Punjabi dialect. These Akalis saluted God with the sword, and rode on the planet earth as if it were a mare. A few words and phrases that are left to us still record the history of the elevation of the mind of the whole race. Alas ! the Akali is gone. His language is dead, his self-realization too has volatilized. The rich Sikh sardars and princes, and self-seeking money-makers, the tax-gatherers are fettered today with the same illusions that have been the death of all religions. The spirit of the Sikh is of the immortals. It will rise again. The great spiritualizing of the Akalis of Guru Gobind Singh is not there now, but even a distant semblance of it reminds us vividly of what has been. One stands aghast at contemplating the immensity of power that they breathed. No Akali said "I", he always spoke of himself as "The armies of the Khalsa", *faujan*. The Sikh was renamed by Guru Gobind Singh as 'Singh', the lion. And it is this suffix to every Sikh name, in which it was proposed by the Birth-giver of the Akalis to drown all differences of caste and colour in one large family of the Guru, the Khalsa. The rifle, the sword, the pistol, the *chakkar* (quoit), the bow, the arrow are only physical symbols of the burning, dazzling idealism of the Sikh's inner fervent passion for the Guru. The Akali in prayer was once the voice of Nature. It seemed when he stood at prayer, the trees stood with him, and the snow-turbaned mountain bowed with him. In his God-coloured mind, the stars of the whole sky trembled with the music of emotion. His soul passed thundering; it seemed nature was clapping its hands with joy. It seemed the spirit of the mountains chanted the Ten Gurus' "Sat Sri Akal". And whenever they met each other, they sang to each other this dedicatory song composed by Guru Gobind Singh.

Wah Guruji Kā Khalsa.

Sri Wah Guruji Ki Fateh

Thine O Lord ! are we:

Thine the Khalsa,

Thine the victory.

Thine the glory,

Glory to him—the Guru.

The very sound of these great mantras (aphorisms) of life coined by Guru Gobind Singh transmuted the flesh of man.

The Akalis, few in number, unclad and starved, fought the vast Mughal Empire by charging its high and adamantine ramparts like mad

elephants with nothing but their heads. They wanted to beat empires with the shouts of Sat Sri Akal. They surely conquered the hearts of the people with their singing Glory ! Glory ! to the great Presence. That enthusiasm was unique. And to all thinkers, it must be clear that the Akali spirit was much too modern in its gospel of human liberation, much too restless with the floods of fire pent up in little human hearts, to have sought any merger with the Hindus from whom these supermen mostly sprang, and with the Muslims with whom these saints of God had to fight to what was practically a total self-annihilation.

The Sikh has nothing to give but his life. He is a simple rustic, but sincere. Intellect he does not value, nor its exciting flashes. He is ignorant, but gives away fearlessly his body which the erudite scholars and the so-called saints love to preserve in cotton-wool. Compared to this gift of a soldier in times of danger, all other gifts in the selfish world are mere trinkets and toys. Even in these degenerate days there is the Sikh suffering, and beaming with song both at home and in prison. What is he suffering for? Primarily for the purity of the administration of his church. He may be unlettered, a rustic, wrangling, fighting his kind, but the bosom of a whole *sangat* burns with a glowing love for the ideal of the Guru, with a holiness of prayer, with an intense longing for perfection. It is the upward striving of a man, however heavily encumbered with matter, that is the true worth of man. A self-satisfied man with a few fixed finalities in this awfully immense unknowable mystery and human destiny is a lifeless stone-statue. There is the Cromwellian passion in the present-day Sikhs of the Punjab for casting off the rubbish from the Divine doors of the Guru. Never before in Indian history, has any portion of the Indian race risen with such lofty purpose, as the present-day rustic, the Sikh of the Punjab has risen.

Is not the immaculate purity of the ardent will of the Sikh to maintain his holy places in their atmosphere of divine remembrance a thing of which any group of men anywhere should feel proud. Is the Sikh's untaught and spontaneous willingness to give his own life as oblation at the altar of the temples of the ten Gurus, his Inspirers, his Indwellers, his Gods, not a perpetual gift of the soul to mankind? There is a gem-like glory scintillating like the best radium, in this strong, granite-bosom of immense matter of the electric body politic of the Sikh. Grossness shall drop away, the animal shall be vanquished, but the lustre of this silent heroism shall sparkle on the crown of humanity.

The songs of the Ten Gurus and the lives of unparalleled martyrdom have created a new race-emotion in the Punjab: the Sikhs are a new nation in its inspiration and its remarkable cohesion of the masses. The brief Sikh history and tradition inspire the Punjab peasants as no manner of religious fervour did before, which goes to show that the Sikh has a tradition and culture of his own which the Hindu has been unwilling to receive, though

he wishes at times to pat him on the back as a kind of off-spring. It is unfair of the Hindus to condemn the Sikhs for their attempts to cut themselves away from the mass of Hindudom. They make it a grievance that the Sikhs wish to make their church stand apart.

Who are the Udasis? The monastic sect started by the son of Guru Nanak, Baba Sri Chand. Baba Sri Chand did not differ in any essential detail from his father Baba Guru Nanak, except that he believed that monks alone can spread a new religion. Udasis are responsible for the spread of Sikhism and making temples and institutions. Udasis gradually degenerated into veritable brahmin priests. Seeing how the Guru's word "*Sat Sri Akal-jo bolle so Nihal*" (meaning is not so important as the sound and its cry : Glorious the Timeless. He who shouts is Blessed) inspires the Sikhs. The Hindus of the Punjab at places are adopting the same rhyme "*Sanatam Dhram ki Jai*" jo boley so abhai (Victory to ancient Dharma. He who shouts is fearless). This imitation is a compliment to Sikhism.

The present-day Hindus believe the Sikhs are only a section of the Hindus. If the Hindus had understood Guru Gobind Singh, the political destiny of the country would have been different.

But that was not to be. The Hindu mind being deeply conservative, shuns whatever is new and goes against a certain kind of encrusted orthodoxy. This was challenged by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. Let the Khalsa hold on confidently to the message of the Gurus and follow it. From that miracles unforeseen will follow. Let me close this discourse with the time-honoured cry of the Khalsa : Sat Sri Akal !

(The Timeless Lord is Eternal)

INVOKING INDIA'S HEROIC TRADITIONS

G. S. TALIB

BACKGROUND OF THE AGE

Guru Gobind Singh came to a heritage calling for heroism and vision to infuse the spirit of idealism and patriotism among a people, whom centuries of alien rule had turned supine, and whose only reaction to their situation was a sullen attitude of aloofness. The Hindu, no doubt, had declared the invading Muslim to be on a level of the untouchables of his own society, but that did not conjure away the ugly facts of oppression and tyranny. Muslim rule was firmly and securely established over the major portion of this vast land of India, and whatever resistance the Hindu princes had put in the beginning was rendered futile by their own petty rivalries and the lack of either a unified vision which should call forth the spirit of patriotism, or a powerful central authority whose resources should be strong enough to cope with the onrush of the foreign invaders, fired with the zeal of a proselytizing faith and the lure of plunder of a land reputed to be fabulously rich. At the time of the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni or the later invasions of Shahabuddin of Ghaur, had there been in existence a large empire such as that over which Harsha had ruled, such an empire would have thrown out the invader, and the history of India had perhaps then been different from what it came to be during the six-odd centuries of Muslim rule. As it was, the land was divided into numerous principalities, big and small, and they fell before the invader without much difficulty. Some of the battles fought by the native princes were determined, no doubt, but apart from the resources of such princes, the social and political organization which they could use against the invaders, was lacking in that power and puissance which alone could have stemmed the tide of the invasions.

As state after state fell, the courage and confidence of the invaders naturally grew and the Hindu, long familiar with a philosophy which viewed the world and its phenomena as illusion, turned his gaze farther and farther away from the secular problem of what in the larger sense may be called politics; and his despair with the temporal, fixed his gaze on the

spiritual and the thereafter. Anything like a clear appraisal of the political and social situation was precluded by such a view, and the fact of Muslim conquest was tacitly accepted. Resistance, wherever it was made, soon crumbled, so that the story of the spread of Islamic power towards the east and the south makes amazing reading. The Muslim invaders overthrew their Hindu opponents with the inevitability almost of a mathematical law, and all through the long history of Muslim rule, it will tax a historian's memory, barring a few minor victories, to mention any battles won by the Hindu princes against the Muslims.

Muslim rule in India took the well-known lines of development which it had taken elsewhere, wherever the conquering Arabs, and later their successors in conquest, the Persians, Turks, Afghans and others spread the banner of their victory. Whole nations were converted from their previous faiths, so that a complete metamorphosis came about in the history and traditions of vast masses spread over huge areas. This can be exemplified from the case of Persia, now called Iran, Egypt, the countries comprising Asia Minor, and the so-called 'Arab' lands of the northern parts of Africa. In all these lands the pre-existing cultures, languages and scripts were wiped off, and replaced by the new culture and language of the conquerors. The degree to which the old languages were wiped off differed with the different countries, but even where the vestiges of the older cultures were not entirely wiped off as in Persia and Egypt, there were overwhelming and revolutionary changes. Conversions to the new faith were almost complete and total. Here and there small religious minorities survived, fighting desperately for their existence, and reduced to an inferior status in the body politic. In Central Asia the situation was somewhat different, where fierce warlike nationalities accepted the new faith and many features of its culture, but retained a large proportion of their own national characteristics. These nationalities in their turn coloured the look and conception of medieval Islam not a little, and by becoming its standard-bearers, carried into contemporary Islam many elements drawn from their own history, while assimilating to themselves many features of the original Arab, Koranic Islam.

India was perhaps too vast for the kind of total cultural conquest which the Muslims were able to effect in comparatively smaller lands and among less numerous populations. Moreover, while resistance and hatred were met with by the Muslim conquerors elsewhere too, the institutionalized kind of boycott which they encountered in India in the form of the assumption of untouchability for all Muslims as such, was a peculiar phenomenon. While the hang-over of that attitude is largely responsible for our ills in this country during and after the days of British rule-communalism with all its attendant evils—it was perhaps this institutionalized boycott of the Muslims which helped Hindu society to

escape total absorption into Islam. A kind of xenophobia has long characterized the Hindu people, which while in the post-imperial ages has kept them confined within the country and discouraged the spirit of adventure, did an indirect good in keeping vast masses of Hindus immune from the influence of Islam. The Muslims were, nevertheless, able to convert a sizable portion of the Indian population to their own creed, partly by fair missionary work among the lower orders, who had little reason to love their Hindu overlords excessively, and partly by methods of state coercion and tyranny. That Hindu priestcraft during these ages was not devoid of vision and blindly fanatical, but also corrupt and hypocritical, is amply borne out by the castigation of such corruption by the saints of medieval India, including Kabir and Guru Nanak. All these saints endeavoured to call man to the true essence of God-consciousness and the brotherhood of man. Muslim priestcraft was no less corrupt, and the average Muslim was as ignorant of the nobler essence of religion as the average Hindu.

Medieval India presented not only the spectacle of state tyranny, in which the Muslim was in a comparatively privileged position as compared with the Hindu, but a situation of innumerable warring creeds and sects. There was not only the larger phase of this strife as between the Hindus and the Muslims, who reacted to each other with collective hate, but also as between Muslim and Muslim and Hindu and Hindu. The Muslim sects were also numerous, and their doctrinal differences were sharp and often led to mutual persecution. But in India the vast majority of Muslims were of the Sunni persuasion whose doctrines are well-codified, and which directed through the ruling Sultans a clear-cut state policy of discrimination and aggression against the Hindus. Other Muslim Churches like the Shia had comparatively fewer adherents, and except in scattered places and sporadically, did not have much political authority. They were, consequently, not in position to deal with the Hindu populations aggressively like their Sunni counterparts.

THE INDIAN BABEL

The Hindu religious scene was a veritable babel. Apart from the four major castes, on the basis of domicile, history or some patron saint, and very often these sub-castes, despite bearing the same generic name, would not inter-dine or inter-marry. There were hundreds upon hundreds of sects and orders practising certain rituals which divided them sharply and aggressively, so that their cosmologies, philosophies and credal practices were vastly different and there was open mutual hostility among them. It was only because of the common opposition which all these castes, sects and sub-castes felt for the Muslims with their foreign creed that they could be lumped collective as Hindus—a name given in a spirit of contempt by

the Muslims, though it has stuck on, and its original, contemptuous associations are by now forgotten. Originally 'Hindu' was synonymous with-as a matter of fact the Muslim and earlier the Greek word for 'Indian'.

This common and mutual dislike of the Muslims, however, did not confer any kind of unity of outlook or action, or any vision on the non-Muslim people of India. Barring the social boycott of the Muslims, they may hardly be said to have had a policy or article of statesmanship, or even the consciousness of having lost their freedom, or of themselves and their creeds being subjected to the will of arrogant alien conquerors. The Muslim conquest was accepted, with the characteristic Indian attitude of resignation and passivity, as an act of fate, and there was little resistance to it. Here and there certain princes kept up the fight, which in most cases was unequal and doomed to failure. Such resistance was feudal, dynastic and sporadic. Anything like the spectacle of a prince or saint or leader making a call against the foreigner or the common defiler of religion is not known to India during this period. The Christian princes of medieval Europe led the crusades to liberate Palestine, the holy land of Christ's birth, from the Turks; and the Christians of ninth century France and fifteenth century Spain fought heroically to guard and liberate their lands from the Arabs. Any parallel phenomenon in India has not taken place, till we come to much later times, when the Sikh Church undertook such patriotic tasks of liberation. But of that a little later.

HEROISM AMONG THE HIGH AND THE LOW

There appears to have been cases of individual heroism and martyrdom on the part of the Hindus—princes as well as commoners—in standing steadfast by their faith and family piety in the face of Muslim coercion. The Maharashtrian saint, Namdev, appears to have been threatened with being trampled to death. The incident is narrated in an ecstatic vision, and is included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Namdev, standing steadfast by his faith, despite his mother's appeal to him to save his life by compromising his religion, is stated there-in to have been succoured by the Lord who came riding on the mighty bird Garuda in all His splendour, as in ancient mythologies. Whatever interpretation may be put on the miraculous divine intervention, there is no doubt of the fact of religious persecution and Namdev's heroic steadfastness. Kabir was prosecuted as an apostate, and for reasons which cannot be precisely determined, was ultimately let off. There are then the innumerable stories of Hindu women—princesses as well as commoners—who immolated themselves rather than surrender their chastity to some Muslim prince or chief or local notable. Everyone knows of the noble sacrifice of Padmini, the Rani of Chittor, who escaped Alauddin Khilji's lust by leaping on the burning pyre, and of hosts of unnamed ladies and princesses who

immolated themselves in like circumstances. These are, even more touching, the stories of simple village maidens who, true to the noble traditions of Indian womanhood, defied the overture of their Muslim captors, and not lured by the life of comfort which their surrender promised, sought honourable death in the flames of fire or the waves of river, pond or well. Several such ballads, typical of many such acts of sacrifice, are current in the Punjab and Rajasthan countryside. Such incidents no doubt occurred frequently in other parts of the country as well.

Despite such acts of individual heroism, there was no organized resistance to Muslim aggression, so that it would not be wrong to conclude that the Indian people as a whole had during this period fallen into a state of passivity and had completely failed to respond to the call of the times. Society was static in its vision, looking to a legendary past, which was not understood in realistic terms, but was viewed only through the cloudy vagueness of a hoary mythology. Mythologies allegorize and picture certain moral abstractions, but in the process they become completely inapplicable to any real situations, and while imparting faith, at the same time make any understanding of or adjustment to reality impossible. Religion in India in this age consisted in reiterating divisions and distinctions, so that while the externals were emphasized, the reality was rendered more and more vague. More than anything else, there was utter lack of a vision. No one, for example, appears to have formulated the thesis of the basic unity of the native creeds of India, known roughly as Hinduism, or of the unity of the people adhering to such creeds. No one appears, again, to have thought of applying the lessons of the ancient mythologies with their tales of heroic wars between the gods and demons, Right and Wrong or Good and Evil to the situation obtaining in India in these centuries of Muslim rule. It appears to have occurred to no one to think of applying the Assurance of the Lord in the Gita, to rise again and again to uphold Dharma or Righteousness, to the age in which Hindudom was groaning under the crushing heel of Islam.

GURU NANAK'S VOICE

Demoralization was bound to set in soon after the foreign conquest, which maintained itself largely on ruthlessness and terror. The privileged classes, like their counterparts every-where, were not slow to make such terms with the conquerors as circumstances might permit. They took to state service, and in the process, adapted themselves to the culture and tastes of the conquerors. History does not record any prominent Hindus who might have served as high officials or commanders of the state in the pre-Mughal period, though after particularly the conciliating policy of Akbar, such dignitaries became numerous, and in the lower strata also. one

hears of large number of Hindu functionaries of various orders. But even in pre-Mughal times there must have been a very prominent set of Hindu nobles and commoners in the state service, and in their privileged position, they must have affected superiority to the common people. Guru Nanak must have regarded this phenomenon as sufficiently highly developed and a mark of national degradation. That is why he thought it necessary to voice strong disapproval of the 'Muslimized' Hindu mercenaries who affected Muslim ways, and who must have sold their souls for wordly advantages. In the Dhanasari measure says Guru Nanak, commenting on this situation;

'The Khatris (Kshatrias, the wielders of the sword) have turned away from the true faith, and have taken to tongue of the foreigner'.

(GGS, 663)

Elsewhere, while detailing the general state of degradation of the Hindus, Guru Nanak says :

They have begun to call the Creator Allah; this is the age of the supremacy of the Sheikhs (Muslim divines); The temples of the gods are taxed under this innovation;

The Muslims ablution, pitcher, the call of namaz, and the namaz, the Muslims' prayer-carpet are in vogue;

God himself is conceived by them in blue robes after the Muslim style;

Everyone takes pride in calling himself 'Mian' thus is your language got perverted.' (GGS, 119)

The course of Sikhism in its early phases, while showing consciousness of the need for what may be termed the national outlook in unifying the warring sects, and further as between Hindu and Muslim, did not have any clear-cut 'political' tendencies. Guru Nanak is unique among the saints in India in showing sensitiveness on the question of national honour and self-respect, as witnessed by the portions of his compositions quoted above, and by his great conscience—stirring hymn on Babar facing the Indian people, steeped in their moral degradation; and his enunciation of the eternal law of God according to which immorality and unrighteousness must inevitably be visited with ruin. A few excerpts from these hymns will amply illustrate the view-point advanced here :

1. The Lord took Khurasan under His wing, but loosened terror over Hindustan;
Who can blame the Creator, as He sent the Mughal, incarnation of death :

In such anguish of suffering have the people of this land wailed;
Did not that move Thee to pity? (GGS, 360)

2. The lure of wealth brings people to forget God, and to suffer such degradation :

It comes not except by wickedness and at death must fall off.

Those whom the Lord dooms to forget Himself, He deprives of all

goodness. (Page 417)

3. Babar has rushed down from Kabul with his wedding party of lust, and unrighteously demands the surrender of India's womanhood. Decency and religion have hid themselves from fright; unrighteousness is rampant and triumphant. Muslim and Hindu priest are thrust aside; the Devil is making unholy marriages :
Nanak, in this carnage everywhere rise wails and lament; blood flows all around to serve for the ritual saffron.
Just, however, is the Lord and just is His doom; He is ever just.
(Those who live in sin) their life's garment shall be torn to tatters and shreds—Let India remember my warning !

(GGS, 722-23)

These brief excerpts, particularly the last, are eloquent in expressing the agony, anguish and shame of Guru Nanak's soul, in which the outraged soul of India herself speaks. The shame, the degradation, the helplessness—no one till then had felt or expressed these so keenly. This is what distinguishes the Sikh religious movement from other contemporary religious orders, which comparatively were merely revivalist sects, however widespread their appeal. None of the others had the creative character of Sikhism, which Guru Nanak's vision brought to it.

The Sikh Church, however, continued up to the time of the fifth Apostle, Guru Arjan (martyred 1606) to spread the idea of the Beneficent and Just God of Guru Nanak's conception, to wean the people away from fanaticism and superstition, and in general to work for their moral uplift. The early Gurus were advocates of universal love and peace, and kept themselves away from political matters, engaged entirely in their beneficent spiritual ministry. There are rumblings of growing troubles, particularly from the time of the fourth Apostle, Guru Ram Das. One Khatri of the Marwaha clan appears to have traduced him to some authority, probably the viceroy at Lahore, but his complaint was rejected and recoiled on himself, so that he returned laden with shame and ignominy. The Guru has alluded to the incident in passionate language in a hymn, affirming his faith in the succour of His Saints by the Lord.

By the time that Guru Arjan came to occupy the apostolic seat, it appears the Sikh Church was gathering enough importance to draw on itself the hostility both of the Muslim divines and the Mughal court. Among others, Sheikh Ali Sirhandi, who arrogated to himself the title of Mujiddid-i-Alf-i-Sani (Renovator of Islam in the Second Millenium) is stated to have sent a complaint to Jahangir against the growing influence of Guru Arjan as a religious teacher, to whom some Muslim also showed reverence.¹ This the fanatical Muslims theologians and priests naturally

1 Khushwant Singh. *History of the Sikhs*. Vol. I.

would not stand, and as a measure of striking terror among non-Muslims trying to 'pervert' Muslims and also by way of punishing him for his temerity in blessing Jahangir's rebel son, Khusró, then a fugitive from his father's terror, Guru Arjan was sentenced to death with torture. Religious persecution and political animosity both appear, on Jahangir's own testimony in his 'Tuzuk' or Memoirs to be the motives which prompted the barbarous sentence against Guru Arjan. He is stated to have been offered the alternative to embrace Islam to save his life. Guru Arjan met his terrible fate in a spirit of calm faith, as few in the vast history of mankind have done. His life was a continuous toil in the service of the Lord, singing hymns overflowing with divine love and thanks-giving, bringing civilization and true religion among men and teaching all—Hindus as well as Muslims—the way to righteousness. His barbarous torture and death sent a wave of anguish and deep suffering among the Sikhs, and suddenly confronted them with the ugly but insistent fact of the existence in the world of tyrannous and arrogant power, from whose operation not even the holiest like Guru Arjan were immune, and which must inevitably take its evil course, unless deterred by the act of man or God. Such evil could not be forgotten in the face of its impinging reality. God is the principle of Righteousness, but evil is very really there in His world. Suffering is the way of the man of God in the face of assertive and arrogant evil. And it was this suffering of martyrdom, which Guru Arjan embraced with such calm resignation as only one God-inspired like him, could show.

HISTORY TAKES A TURN

As is well-known, the young son of Guru Arjan, Hargobind, who succeeded him as the sixth Guru, adopted as the Apostolic style two swords, instead of the rosary of his predecessors. And his seat he called a 'throne' instead of a 'cot' as heretofore. These marks of royalty and power were necessitated by the need to reorientate the general outlook and policy of the Sikh Church. It had to make itself militant in order to survive the onslaught of the powerful Mughal Empire, now openly treading the path of persecution of other faiths. Certain consequences followed. The Guru's presence now came to be styled a 'court'; those who flocked to him brought gifts of arms and horses, and banded themselves into a small army. From this time on began that state of conflict with Mughal rule which continued ever after with occasional intervals of calm and peace. Guru Hargobind had also to undergo imprisonment for a period by order of his father's persecutor, Jahangir, but was later set free. With Shah Jahan's forces he fought a few skirmishes, and in the end retired to the foot of the hills beyond deep ravines, to Kiratpur. His relations with the Mughals were of open hostility. The Sikhs in the meantime were acquiring the character of a militant force, a kind of private militia, which was later given, with the

inspiration and thoroughness of genius, such a powerful turn by Guru Gobind Singh, grandson of Guru Hargobind, just mentioned above. With Guru Gobind Singh the might and force of Hindudom, till then lying dormant and helpless, rose with the splendour of a powerful flood and swept off the torpor and meek sufferings of centuries. This was the initiation of a mighty revolution, the lighting of a torch to set ablaze a vast land—but of that in another place.

ANOTHER MARTYRDOM

Jahangir's policy of religious persecution appears not to have persisted for very long. It was possibly a politic assertion of Muslim theocratic power in reaction to the policy of tolerance pursued by Akbar, which in the eyes of orthodox Muslims was not in keeping with the character of the Islamic state, as the sultanate of Delhi for several centuries had now come to be regarded. Aurangzeb, who wrested the throne in 1656 after a series of brilliant though unscrupulous strokes of strategy, unleashed a countrywide campaign of religious persecution of the Hindus. Temples were demolished, idols were desecrated, the teaching of Hindu religion was banned, and repressive measures were enacted otherwise to degrade and humiliate the Hindus. *Jazya*, the Muslim canonical tax on non-Muslims was reimposed, and places of Hindu pilgrimage were taxed. All these measures, backed by a determined state drive of repression resulted in large-scale conversions to Islam under duress. These measures of Aurangzeb were aimed at turning India into an Islamic state in actual terms—by converting its entire population to Islam. Not only that, even the Shia Muslims, professing a minority creed within Islam, who are looked upon as schismatics by the Sunnis (the sect to which Aurangzeb belonged) were sought to be coerced into the Sunni Church. For this objective, Aurangzeb, whose persistence was almost superhuman, spent the last twenty-five years of his life, when he was past sixty already, campaigning in the Deccan against the Shia Muslim Kingdoms which after their conquest were to form a Mughal province, later to become the state of Hyderabad.

The Indian Muslims have not concealed Aurangzeb's true role as the King who aimed at converting the whole of India to Islam. Contemporary Muslim writers of memoirs have flatteringly and out of a sense of elation recorded all the enactments of Aurangzeb for the coercion of Hindus. The tradition lingers to this day among the advocates of Islamic domination in the Indian sub-continent to regard Aurangzeb as almost a sacred personage, the Ghazi or crusader for the faith. The poet Iqbal, by whom has been nurtured in great part the idea of Islamic domination which in time became the demand for Pakistan, in his philosophical work in verse, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (Secrets of the Ecstatic Bliss) has narrated an incident of

Aurangzeb's intrepidity on the sudden appearance of a tiger when at prayer. In introducing the story, after lamenting the 'apostasy' of Akbar and the subsequent proliferation of that in Dara, Shah Jahan's mystically-inclined son, done to death by Aurangzeb, his younger brother—Aurangzeb is significantly designed as '*Tarkash-i-mara khadang-i-akhirin*' : (The last arrow in our, i.e. the Indian Muslims', quiver).

Guru Tegh Bahadur, of a retiring temperament and singer of hymns expressing deep non-attachment to the world was, however, drawn from his saintly life into the vortex of the contemporary conflict when Aurangzeb's campaign of the coercion of Hindus touched unbearable limits. According to the Sikh tradition certain Kashmiri Brahmins, in whose land the coercive conversion of Hindus to Islam was certainly an open and daily tyranny, came in deputation to Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur, his retreat at the foot of the hills near the eastern bank of the Sutlej. This Anandpur was destined later to play such an important role in the history of the Sikhs and to be the fountain-head of their heroic inspiration. It is stated that on hearing their tale of woe, the Guru sent word through these Kashmiri Brahmins to Aurangzeb to convert him first, and if so, the rest of the Hindus would follow suit. As holds the Sikh tradition firmly that stirred by the need to assert himself in the face of such open tyranny, the Guru sought to create resistance to this religious persecution. This is not the same thing as a general revolt against Mughal rule as such. That, as a matter of fact, was not in the mind either of Guru Tegh Bahadur or his son Guru Gobind Singh. It was an assertion and a gesture of national honour and self-respect—an act of protest, so to speak—but not a revolt in the ordinary political sense. For this purpose he undertook a tour of the lands lying south, in the neighbourhood of the imperial capital, Delhi. The Guru's progress lay towards Delhi and beyond up to Agra, through the tracts which now comprise the areas of Ambala, Patiala, Sangrur, Jind, Narwana, Kurukshetra, Rohtak and other tracts adjoining the Capital. On the route taken by him to preach steadfastness in faith, shrines exist, sacred to his memory. That the Guru was preaching resistance to his State programme of religious persecution is amply borne out by the fact of his arrest on some trumped up charge and the sentence of torture, execution and quartering passed on him. That Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life a martyr to the cause of the protection of religion is testified by the tribute paid to his father by Guru Gobind Singh himself, in his autobiographical fragment, Vichitra (Bachitra) Natak (The Wonderful Drama). Thus runs the great passage :

"The Lord (Tegh Bahadur) protected their¹ religious sacraments;²

- 1 'Their' refers no doubt to the Kashmiri Hindus, about whose appeal to the Guru this account is silent, but from the context some such appeal is implied.
2. Literally, the paste-mark and the thread.

A mighty deed was performed in this (dark) Kali Age. He who made this great sacrifice for the good and the holy,

Gave away his head, but uttered not the whisper of a groan.

He did this noble deed for the protection of faith;

He gave up life but not his ideal.¹

To perform tricks² and such petty practices would be a shame for men of God.

He smashed the potsherd of his life on the head of the King of Delhi, and departed for the City of the Lord;

None else has equalled what Tegh Bahadur performed.

On his departure the world was plunged in grief;

The world cried out in anguish, but the gods greeted him with shouts of victory.³

The impact of the great sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur, was extremely powerful and far-reaching in its consequences on the Sikh people. The child-Guru, as Guru Gobind Singh then was,³ retired with his family and followers to a place further into the interior, protected by deep ravines, and accessible to the Mughal soldiery with difficulty. This was Paonta, situated on the western bank of the Jamuna, at a junction of hill-roads leading to the northeast towards the valley of Dehradun. This was a purely Hindu area, inhabited by the hill folk, whose rulers were of Rajput origin, who were themselves refugees from the Muslim coercion of an earlier age. Here the Guru, as testified by himself spent his time in receiving various kinds of skills, scholarly and martial; and engaged a great deal in hunting and other many exercises.

The Guru, of course, continued here to be visited by his devotees from all parts of the land, particularly from the centre of the Punjab. A township grew at this picturesque and lovely spot. 'Paonta' literally means 'foot-rest'—the place where the Guru settled down to make his halt. Evidently a numerous camp grew around the handsome and heroic Guru, scion of a dynasty which stood for the protection of faith—the Redeemer, the Lord Splendid. Here the Guru, when he was come of age, ran into troubles with the hill chiefs, who looked upon him as a rival power, bidding fair to constitute a threat to their hegemony. They formed a great alliance against him, attacked him, and a pitched bloody battle was fought at Bhangani, a few miles away from Paonta. This itself shows that the hill chiefs were the aggressors and invaders, and the Guru fought a defensive action. In this battle as many as four important hill chiefs were killed, along with a large

1. Some scholars would interpret 'Prabh' (Prabhu) in this passage as God. But the whole context, which recounts the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur, points away from such an interpretation.
2. There is a tradition, borne out here, that the Muslim divine trying Guru reputed. He contemptuously repudiated the suggestion, as it would be unworthy of a man of God to save his life by tricks. He was determined to wear the martyr's crown.
3. His name from birth was Gobind Rai. He adopted the name Gobind Singh like all Sikhs after the new 'Baptism of Steel' which was introduced in Samvat 1756 (1699).

number of their retainers, including some of their Muslim mercenaries, deserters from the Guru's service. According to the accounts of this battle preserved by the hill states, eight ranis performed sati along with their husbands' bodies. The Guru's victory was complete, but evidently he did not covet any territory and moreover, did not wish to enter into unnecessary further skirmishes and vendetta and counter-vendetta with the hill chiefs. Such battles, however, were forced on him later. It is not the intention here to give a detailed account of the Guru's battles, which can be read about in the Guru's biographical accounts. The points to be elucidated here are mainly two—the causes which prompted the hill chiefs to make concerted and repeated attacks on the Guru, and the Guru's own plan to raise the heroic spirit among the Indian people. These two points, therefore, are considered below.

OBSTRUCTIONS FROM WITHIN

Guru Gobind Singh had not only to contend with the powerful and vastly resourceful empire of Aurangzeb, backed by aroused Muslim fanaticism, but also with the apathy and active hostility of influential element within Hindudom. The fight of Guru Gobind Singh was not against Muslims as such, or against Islam. The Muslim masses, who were for the most part Hindu converts and only partially initiated into the creed of Islam, were indifferent to controversial issues, and only aware in a dim way of the difference between Muslim and Hindu in certain externals. The small minority who were descendants of the invading Turks, Afghans, Turanians and Mughals and other foreigners, and who had the privileged position as an army of occupation, and led the campaigns of coercion and Hindu-baiting. But even so, not every upper class Muslim was a sworn enemy of Hindus, and the general communal problem in the sense in which we have learnt to view it since recent times, did not exist. It was only in large towns where there were seats of authority that scenes of persecution of Hindus were occasionally witnessed. A general situation in which the Hindu might be driven to the wall, would arise only when a special policy to this effect was initiated, as happened during the reign of Aurangzeb, or earlier in such periods as the reigns of Firoz Tughlak and Alauddin Khilji.

Generally, there was communal peace. When a campaign was on, as after the mighty development within the Sikh Church with the initiation of the New Baptism of Steel, the Muslim countryside might be aroused to harass and pursue the Sikhs, as was actually done, partly in the name of religion and partly by the attraction of murder and loot. But usually there would be Muslims fighting along with the Hindus. In any case, however peaceful and broadbased in universal terms Guru Gobind Singh's appeal might be, his fight against Mughal persecution was sooner or later bound

to arouse the general opposition not only of the Muslim nobility, but also of the Muslim masses. That was natural and inevitable, and for the Guru to be dubbed and hunted as an enemy of the Muslims, however wrong, was unavoidable. Some Muslims still were loyal and helpful to him to the last, but these were the exceptions. The generality of the Muslims joined in the hunt. The Muslim countryside was in turn ravaged a few years later by the hurricane which Banda Bahadur raised.

The more surprising thing was the Hindu opposition. Hindu indifference to Sikhism was understandable. Sikhism was of course, not just another sect within Hinduism, emphasizing this or that ritual or practice or belief. If it were such, with one of the current deities or ritual practices as the cardinal element in its teaching, Hindudom would obviously have recognized as only a restatement of itself, and then it would have drawn a loosely assorted Hindu following, and settled down as a creed within Hinduism. As a matter of fact, after particularly the establishment of the Sikh Kingdom till the rise of the orthodox reform movement called the Singh Sabha, Sikhism did tend to lapse into general Hinduism. In that phase, the true meaning of the Guru's Word was only partially understood and perhaps misinterpreted through ignorance or deliberate perversion, and there was the open spectacle of Sikhism reverting to Sanatanist practices.

But Sikhism, while maintaining a vital relationship with Hinduism through certain fundamental beliefs, such as that in transmigration and in general, ethical and philosophical ideas, particularly in emphasizing non-attachment without commending mendicancy, did at the same time make fundamental departures which would not fit in with the notions of the average Hindu, accepted as vital for millenia. The enlightened Hindu would find expressed, in the teachings of Sikhism most of the lofty ideals which the sages of India had of old preached. The vocabulary, terminology and illustrative mythological literature used by Sikhism were overwhelmingly Hindu, except for the use here and there of a few spiritual and ethical expressions derived from Persian and Arabic, partly because these were commonly understood in medieval India, and partly in order to foster the spirit of tolerance for the Muslim and generally to create an atmosphere of goodwill. Certain terms were given in Sikhism a new orientation, such as '*seva*' (service), '*Akal*' (the Eternal), '*sangat*' (congregation), '*Guru*' (the Preceptor), '*Kartar*' (The Creator, in the monotheistic sense), '*Gurdwara*' (The Temple) etc., etc. But despite these special features which were not totally unfamiliar to a Hindu, Sikhism presented a new dynamic view of life, revolutionary in its implications. It repudiated the ascetic ideal and the life of the recluse. It hit at untouchability in particular and many aspects of caste—chiefly at the idea of the sanctity of the Brahmin and his exclusive prerogative to set up as the

custodian and preceptor of religion. Further, it rejected a vast body of superstitions, beliefs and propitiatory and quasi-magical practices which had in the ages of decadence got identified with Hinduism. Again, belief in the avatars or incarnations of the Supreme Being, such as Rama and Krishna and the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and other gods and goddesses found no place in the unadulterated monotheism¹ of the Sikh creed. So also was idol worship repudiated, and even the uneducated Sikh understood that rather than bow before idols, he must bow before the Guru as symbolised in the Holy Granth.

Sikhism made for a general realistic approach to the problem of life, and exhibited what may be called the historical imagination in reacting to the social situation. This again was a revolutionary idea, as against the general impression of the Hindu outlook in a mythological past, uncritical and vague in its approach to problems, to which it reacted unrealistically. Nevertheless, as long as the main emphasis of Sikhism till the time of Guru Arjan was on Bhakti (Devotion), Simran (i.e. Smaran or Meditation) and general piety, the Hindu still could recognize it as something not very unfamiliar. Consequently, during this period high-caste Hindus, particularly of the Khatri (Kshatriya) caste, came under its influence, with a good admixture of the other castes, high and low. But with the revolutionary turn towards resistance and militarism which Sikhism appeared to take after the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, it presented to the average Hindu a somewhat unfamiliar emphasis. While Hinduism had a glorious heroic past, it had ceased to have a realistic appeal because of the mythological manner of its presentation of war. The Hindu failed to realize that the Asuras and Rakshasas (Demons and Monsters) of the legends and myths of his religious fictions were here and now, in the shape of the tyrants of these later times. This link he could not provide, for his approach was fictional and mythological. Hence to the average Hindu, Sikhism was strange and startling, which he could not fit into his notions. The dynamic view of history which he did not have, could alone have justified Sikhism to him. Hence, while Guru Hargobind and his son and grandson, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh, engaged in a mighty crusade, the Hindu stood aloof generally. It was those who stood practically outside the pale of orthodox Hinduism—the Jats, Kalals, carpenters and other workers, who mainly carried the burden of the new revolutionary programme of the Gurus. The higher castes came in only in a trickle. That, however, is the general pattern of all ideological and social revolutions.

To turn now to the Hindu Hill Chiefs who came in conflict with Guru Gobind Singh. They were, despite their petty principalities, extremely

1 Sikhism is apparently monotheistic, though its cosmology is much wider than simple monotheism would imply.

proud scions of families which had long ruled over these areas. They were, besides, under the influence of an age-long religious and social conservatism, difficult to shake out of its old ruts. As a matter of fact, these areas to this day continue more conservative than the neighbouring plains of the Punjab. The society which these chiefs represented, was characterized by a great incapacity to adjust itself to the changing demands of historical forces, which had long been a feature of Hindu society. Hindu imagination hitched itself to a hoary past, which coloured its entire approach to life; and by shutting out a dynamic view of history, rendered itself static and helpless against aggression. India of the past, of course, was a vast world in itself—a conglomeration of numerous kingdoms; and a unit or a country only in the sense that its people had a common social code, which provided the irreducible minimum that bound them in what may be called an ethico-socio-spiritual entity. This society, spread over such a vast area for that age of primitive communications, separated at every few miles by differences of customs and language, was moreover, governed by a rigid caste-system, assumed to be established by the gods themselves and admitting of no reform or reorientation. The new ideals of Guru Gobind Singh, which could be fulfilled only by a people who could entertain the view of a dynamic society, and who could make adjustments to the unsparing demands of history and had vision and foresight, were not only not understood by the higher castes and classes among the Hindus, but were actually violently opposed by them. It was still another instance of the patient stabbing the physician, or the riders on the boat attacking the pilot in mid-stream while the tempest was raging. Not that this is a rare phenomenon in history. Those who have sought to benefit mankind at the cost of their comfort and life, have been paid back only with indifference, calumny and hostility. So, Guru Gobind Singh met with disapproval from the Brahmins who though he was subverting the ancient basis of society when he sought to bring all the castes (the four *varnas*) together, like his predecessors in the House of Nanak. To the conservative mind the new synthesis of Hinduism, which Guru Gobind Singh sought to formulate, was unintelligible. It looked upon the new movement in the nature of heresy and apostasy.

The Hindu chiefs and feudal lords, who had their own vested interests to serve, and like all members of their class, would make all kinds of compromises with those more powerful than themselves (in this case the Mughals) in order to retain their privileges, would naturally be with their overlords against a leader like the Guru, whose movement was subversive of authority. While on the one hand they were anxious not to fall foul of the Mughal viceroys, who held them under the terror of their authority, on the other they were as much afraid of a mass-movement of the less privileged orders as were the Brahmins. Such a movement meant a

challenge to themselves and to their henchmen. Hence the virulent opposition of the Hill Chiefs of the lower Shivalik ranges, around the present districts of Nahan, Hoshiarpur, Kangra and Mandi, to the new Order of Guru Gobind Singh. They had inherited traditions of fighting from their ancestors, but their rule was that of an oligarchy, given to its privileges and pleasures, playing petty power-politics, and afraid of change, which, moreover, they did not understand.

THE HEROIC PAST

As stated by himself in Vichitra (Bachitra) Natak (already referred to) Guru Gobind Singh felt called upon by the Lord to 'go into the terrestrial world and establish the faith; and further to turn mankind away from senseless practices'. The Mandate of the Lord ran : 'Spread Righteousness and defeat and destroy the wicked and evil-doers everywhere.....To spread Righteousness, to uphold holy men and to uproot the wicked root and branch'.

This statement of his life's mission, thus expressed in mythological terms, points clearly to the over-riding idea in the Guru's mind to prepare himself and his followers for a crusade in defence of faith and honour which the Mughal overlords of his day were so ruthlessly attacking, and to end a situation in which a non-Muslim could live only in the most abject servitude. This, of course, does not imply all that a 'political' programme in these times would imply or include, like a revolutionary plan to wrest power and to deprive the occupants of the royal seat of their positions. As time passed, some of these objectives by the inescapable logic of events, did get incorporated into the general movements of Sikhism, and sovereignty did as a matter of fact pass from the arrogant but effete Mughal lords to the unprivileged multitudes, so that Bullah Shah, the Sufi poet of eighteenth century Punjab felt constrained to sum up the political situation thus :

'God in His Inscrutable Will has conferred Kingship on the wearers of rough blankets'.

The haughty Mughals are forced from frustration to swallow poison bowls.'

There is in these times such a tendency, particularly among the younger, university-educated interpreters of Sikhism to view the life-work of Guru Gobind Singh on the analogy of the careers of the creators of political and ideological revolutions of our times, so that wrong perspectives are obtained and the true and historical figure of the Guru-saint, God-inspired superman and crusader, but no carver out of political order is likely to be reduced to that of a mere revolutionary and ideologue. The Guru's life-work was much deeper and of a much more lasting character than that of the creator of a revolution, albeit out of his work

1 Refers no doubt to the leaders of the bands of Sikh peasants.

revolutionary movements and far-reaching consequences affecting the destinies of peoples and nations flow, as did from the work of other founders of faiths. He fixed men's minds on the ideal—the quest for right and truth—from which crusading action naturally flowed, ultimately to bring down those in the seats of arrogant and iniquitous power.

The Guru's early life, first at Anandpur while his holy father, Guru Tegh Bahadur was living, and after his martyrdom, at the retreat of Paonta where a large force grew round him and he came to be looked upon as a power to be reckoned with by the neighbouring chiefs, is described in summary hints in *Bachitra Natak*, than which naturally there is no more trustworthy testimony :

'I was brought (from the eastern parts) into the Punjab land,
And fondled by various nurses.
I was looked after in a variety of ways,
And given instruction in several arts.
When I came to the age to handle affairs of faith,¹
My father departed to the Abode of the Lord.
When the management of the estate² devolved on me.
I advanced the Cause of faith with my best endeavour.
In various forests did I pursue the chase.
And hunt the bear, the nilgao and the stag.
Later I changed my abode to new parts.
And turned my attention to setting up the town of Paonta.
There I enjoyed a rich life on the banks of the Jamuna,
And saw various kinds of wonderful sights.
Many a tiger of that area did I kill.
As well as pierce nilgao and the bear.'

During all this period, the Guru was engaged in perfecting himself in martial exercises and no doubt encouraging his followers, whose numbers were ever on the increase by those who came to join him from the plains of the Punjab, to imbibe a similar discipline of arms. He was also, as stated in the lines quoted above, 'advancing the cause of faith,' which means increase in the number of devout followers of Sikhism, who imbibed the faith from the sight and work of the Guru himself. Presumably a large portion of the devotional hymns of the Guru's own composition belongs to this period when, we are told, he would rise at early dawn, engage in prayer and meditation, and compose the hymns and prayers which are now part of the daily prayer of the Sikhs.

Here no doubt accounts of the increasing atrocities of the Mughals would reach the Guru. His influence and power were increasing. Out in the plains the Sikhs were raising material resources to build up the Guru's strength, as is testified by some of the 'Hukam-Namahs' or Command-

1. The Guru was nine years old when Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred in 1675.

2. Anandpur was like a principality of which the Guru was in a sense the chief, with duties secular as well as religious.

Epistles of the Guru to the Sikhs, who were called upon from time to time to contribute money and equipment to the community store.

As the Guru was contemplating a crusade against the oppressors of his day, invoking the spirit of sacrifice and heroism, he had to meet opposition from wholly unexpected quarters—the Hill chiefs of the neighbourhood. As the Bachitra Natak says :

'Then did the Raja Fateh Shah turn his hostility on us,¹

And engaged in war without cause.'

This was really concerted attack on the Guru by an alliance of several hill rajas, already referred to. The result was the great battle of Bhangani, in which the Guru won a great victory. There were a series of other battles at and around Anandpur, to which the Guru later on moved. The accounts of these battles are given in the Bachitra Natak, composed by the Guru much before the time when the rising crisis led him to give a new shape to the Sikh Church in initiating the Baptism of Steel.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HEROIC POETRY COMPOSED AND SPONSORED BY THE GURU

During his residence at Anandpur, Paonta and his hunting excursions in the hills², the Guru must have come much in contact with the cult of Durga, called Devi or the Goddess, who according to Indian mythology, is the consort of Shiva, and in her various manifestations is Shakti, the Creative Force as well as Chandi, the Destroyer of evil, conceived to be embodied as Asuras or Demons. She wears several names in various parts of the country. She is known as Chamunda, Kali, Kalika, Bhavani, Nangala, Hingula and by several other names. The mythological tale of the battles between Chandi and the Asuras is narrated in the Markandeya Purana. In this tale Chandi, the goddess, is conceived as riding to battle on a Lion, wielding weapons with her eight hands, wading through the blood of the slaughtered Asuras, wearing a garland of their severed heads and attended by hosts of male and female goblins, luxuriating in the carnage made by her, and drinking their fill of the blood spilt. Such is the conception of Chandi, familiar to the Hindu mind, and doubtlessly literally believed in and worshipped in her awesome images in temples sacred to her. Such temples are found in all parts of the country,³ and in larger

1. He was the Raja of Tehri Garhwal, an area comprising modern Dehra Dun, and neighbouring Paonta on the other bank of the Jamuna.
2. The Guru was moving much in the area along the upper reaches of the Sutlej. Hence the appropriateness of naming the lake leading to the Bhakra Dam after him. Gobind Sagar. A large rock at Mandi marks the spot where he is reported to have meditated in the bed of the river Beas. At Nahan which he visited at the invitation of its friendly Raja, Medani Prakash, his camping spot is marked by a Gurdwara, at less than a furlong from the royal residence. Inside the place, in the State Hall, a sword, on the hilt of which the Guru's name is embossed in Gurmukhi, is kept as an article of special note. This was the Guru's gift to the Raja.
3. There are a large number in the plains, and particularly the hills of the Panjab.

places she may have a special temple erected to her, along with other temples sacred to other deities like Krishna and Shiva and others. But the Devi cult is particularly prevalent in the hill areas, and upto now in the districts of Hoshiarpur, Kangra, Simla, Nahan and in Himachal Pradesh in general her worship is the most popular. She is propitiated for all kinds of boons and against all manner of ills.

The story of Durga (Chandi) appears to have deeply fascinated the Guru, as symbolising the might of the Divine Arm in chastising and castigating the evil powers. As shown elsewhere, deep and abiding faith in the ultimate succour of the good and the holy by the Lord of the Universe is a cardinal principle in the religion formulated by Guru Nanak, and communicated and re-emphasized with much force and vehemence by his successors. Such faith is in accord also with the oft-quoted famous words in the Gita, in which the Lord has held out the assurance of intervening in the affairs of the universe in the ages when righteousness has tended to suffer a setback. As amply shown elsewhere from quotations from the compositions of Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh, this faith is pivotal in the cosmology and philosophy of Sikhism, with only this difference that divine intervention was looked upon as the assurance of the ultimate triumph of Right despite its apparent tribulations, and not through the easy, miraculous intervention of the gods, which a superficial view of mythology would tend to encourage. Sikhism recognized the inevitable necessity of a bitter struggle, involving deep suffering and martyrdom for God's saints and crusaders in the war against evil. Sikhism gave poignant reality, by the martyrdom undergone by two of its Preceptors and the tribulations faced by the Guru and countless Sikhs, to the idea of Dharma-Vir or the Crusader for faith. He was conceived to be the divinely-inspired hero, fighting for the ideal and not for a wordly objective. Such was the Guru himself, and such the cardinal principle inculcated by him. The vision which emerges in the meditations of the Teachers of Sikhism is more in accord with the deeper reality at the core of the mystery of the universe than the commonly preached mythological view of an inexplicable miraculous intervention. The commonly accepted view would tend to stifle effort and struggle, and to lodge the upholding of the Right in the mysterious power of the gods rather than in the pure will and undying idealism of the human spirit, resolved to undergo all suffering and to flinch from no trial in defending Right. This was the inherent difference which gave to Sikhism such power to initiate, to move and to build, as against the traditional creeds which left the mind perplexed and unprepared for heroic endeavour.

The Durga-Chandi legend had in it all the elements which, as the Guru perceived, could serve as an analogy or allegory of the situation into which the people of India were thrown for centuries under the heels of

arrogant, ruthless tyrants. Symbolical references to the Divine Might operating as mythological deities are scattered in hundreds of hymns of the Sikh Scripture, and the whole tradition and its meaning were familiar to the Sikhs, as to Hindus in general. In transparent references to the tyrants of their own days, the Gurus had symbolised them as the demons, so much familiarized to the popular imagination by mythology. To destroy tyranny the Sword must be unsheathed—the Sword as the might of India, to strike against the demons of these later times. Unless the soul of India could be aroused to burn all this tyranny in this mighty flame, there would be no end to her ills. By arousing this spirit alone could the Guru fulfil the Lord's mandate, delivered as stated in Vichitra (Bachitra) Natak, 'to destroy the wicked root and branch'. On meditating this legend and its meaning, its deeper significance and its applicability became all the more apparent and powerfully appealing. The Durga-legend was still a living faith with vast masses of the Indian people, who believed literally in this goddess having destroyed the demons, embodiments of evil, at some time in the hoary past.* And this faith postulated the reappearance of the goddess as representative of the Divine Might (Shakti) to appear once again to destroy evil. It was prophesied and believed that at a time when the earth would be oppressed with evil, the last incarnation of the Lord, called Kalki would appear on earth, and clear it of ungodly evil-doers. This event was thought to await consummation at some time in the indeterminate future, but there was the surest and firmest conviction that when the conditions so demanded and the right moment came, the Lord as Kalki would appear to initiate the new millenium (a new Sat-yuga).

The creative genius of Guru Gobind Singh lay in clearly reading the symbolical meanings of the legends of Durga, Rama, Krishna, Kalki and others. The demons were not rampant only in the remote past, calculated according to Hindu mythology in terms of hundreds of thousands of years. Nor was the Promised Appearance of the Lord, similarly thousands of years away. That was precisely, however, as the Indian mind read the meaning of human history; the Lord's intervention was in the hoary past and an indeterminate future. No one thought as to what the meaning of the events of the recent past and the present was. It was thought as if by some inscrutable law, the divine processes were suspended now and from of late, and for the near future. A strangely imperceptive and unrealistic appraisal of the human situation ! The Guru saw and wished his contemporaries to realize that the demonic forces were there, and performing their devil's dance in this holy land of piety and faith. The *asuras* were not far; they were there in the form of every marauder, every arrogant agent of those who held the reins of power. This was precisely the moment when a new

*for another point of view please see editorial note on this article at page no. XIX—Editor

Chandi must appear, when the Sword must be unsheathed and a terrible revenge be taken for all that these generations of tyrants had done to the land. There were the demons, ever-present, and there must ever the Durga-Chandi in action against them, resplendant in her eight arms, mounted on the Lion of her wrath. This was the significance of the Durga-legend for the Guru, and this was why he got more than one version made and recited to those who came to do him reverence. Not with empty piety, divorced from action, but with the zeal for heroic endeavour must his followers be filled.

POETIZATION OF THE LEGEND

Three versions of the Chandi-legend are extant in the vast compilation called Dasam Granth, ascribed wholly or in part to the Guru. Two of these are in Braj, in various metres, as was the custom in this literary era, called Riti Kal or the Age of Tradition in Hindi poetry. This age followed a rigid poetic code, something like the extreme form of neo-classicism in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy and France. To the Guru Chandi is a symbol, an abstraction—the spirit of aroused heroism, the Sword, Divine Might. He is no believer in the mythological and historical goddess as the object of credal worship, who has been carved and moulded in figures and to whom temples have been erected. But that is precisely what the adoration pieces inserted in the legend-versions signify. They present the literal goddess of popular worship, and not the abstraction or the spirit. The Guru has in diverse places distinctly disavowed any association with avatar-worship, and has in a hundred ways affirmed his imperishable monotheistic faith in the One Eternal Lord of Guru Nanak's conception. This he has done to indicate his stand about Durga-worship, as also about the worship of Rama and Krishna and other gods, in their literal aspects as historical deities of popular worship. To him all these names—the synonyms of Chandi, particularly Maha-Kalika and Bhagauti, and the names Rama and Krishna, Narayana, Brahma and their periphrases—all stand for the One Eternal God, uncreated and immortal, and the creator of all 'these and of the infinite universe.'

Besides these two versions in Braj, a third version of the Durga-legend exists in Punjabi *Var* of ballad stanzaic verse in a simple, spirited style, devoid of the baroque embellishments which would be characteristic of the professional poets of the Guru's court, who were reared in the tradition of ornate poetry then in vogue in Hindi. The very simplicity of the style of this version in Punjabi, called variously *Chandi-di-var* or *Var Sri Bhagauti-Ji-Ki*, lends strong force to the view that this must be the Guru's own composition. The Guru did not usually compose verse in Punjabi,

1. This is the view of their authorship which is strongly held by Macauliffe in the *Sikh Religion*.

though this tale and one devotional lyric '*Mitar piyare nun hal muridan da kahna*' are reported to be by him. I endorse with the strongest conviction the view which ascribes these compositions to the Guru. Their spirit is so much in keeping with the Guru's own great personality.

In all these three versions the progress of the tale is on traditional lines and does not in any considerable manner differ from the Puranic story. The usual details of the demons having grown arrogant of their power and threatened the supremacy of the gods, and the gods' supplication to Durga to appear in the field to destroy the demons, and the consequent battles and Durga's victory—such is the pattern in each. The demons are of familiar mythology—Madhu and Kaitabh, Shumbha and Nishumbha, Mahikhasur and Raktabij along with others called Dhumar-lochan, Biralachh and such other dark primeval forces of evil, before whom Ravana and Jarasandha are a matter of yesterday. Durga is in the manner of the Puranic tale, equipped with eight arms, riding the lion, attended by the male and female goblins. The battles rage in full ferocity. Her victories are celebrated by the gods, and after destroying the demons, she restores the monarch of heaven, Indra, to his throne and retires to her abode on Kailash, with her consort Shiva, the embodiment of holy might.

The account of battle is in the prevalent poetic tradition of the age. The similes and attendant details are set, and anticipated. Certain onomatopoeic effects, mention of which would lead this account into a critical discussion of quasi-classical Hindi poetry, are introduced, all which is in accordance with tradition, which no poet with the ambition to be considered a master-craftsman would omit. In the end, from the windows of heaven adoration and flowers are showered on Durga by the grateful gods.

The Punjabi version of the legend is comparatively briefer than the Braj versions and narrates the fight of Durga-Chandi with only one monster, Mahikhasur—the Buffalo-demon. He is the bravest of the brave, calling forth no end of mighty effort on Durga's part to defeat him. There are some stylistic effects, but these are mostly similes of a manly character such as would be familiar to Punjabi listeners of folk poetry of the *Var*.

This as a matter of fact is a *Var* and is so called (a *var* is the Punjabi analogue of a popular ballad). The language is the authentic Central Punjabi, spoken by the war-like tribes of the tracts where the propagation of Sikhism had been most concentrated and from which the majority of the Guru's brave fighters were drawn. Its stanza is in the *Var* tradition, with a few in *shirkhandi* or blank verse. This too is in the accepted tradition of this genre in Punjabi. Such are the general characteristics of this version, one of the best pieces of narrative poetry in Punjabi.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE CHANDI-TALES

The most striking features in all the three Chandi-tales are the battle scenes between Chandi (Durga) and the various demons. The Guru himself as narrator, and the poets who rendered the legend into Braj, (granting that these two Braj versions are by poets other than the Guru) are not interested in inculcating the Durga-cult or the esoteric aspects of Chandi-worship. Their primary and main interest lies in making their versions of the legend the vehicle of one significance solely, and that is to arouse the dormant spirit of crusading for faith and honour among the Indian people, through graphic narratives of the tale most redolent of heroism in the mythology of the land. While the story of Rama and his war with Ravana is equally illustrative of the struggle of Right against Wrong, it is overlaid with much ancillary matter, which to a certain extent obscures the core of the heroic theme. But the Durga story is a story of the battle for the protection of Right in its most elemental form, and in the mystique which has developed round her figure through the ages, Durga is the embodiment of Righteous Might par excellence, battling eternally with Evil. To the Guru the figure of Durga is illustrative of that Divine Might which in age after age inspires men of God to battle for faith and truth against the evil forces which are, by an inscurtable law of God, perpetually trying to disrupt the divine order, and are as perpetually put down. From his divine poems the Guru's interpretation of the Durga-symbol is unambiguously clear. It stands for the Eternal, the Timeless Creator. Thus in one *Swaiya* (quatrain) occurring within the framework of the autobiographical *Bachitra Natak*, the Guru offers adoration to the Lord by mentioning the destruction of the demons who are traditionally described as destroyed by Durga :

Millions of demons, such as Sumbha, Nisumbha, He has destroyed in an instant;

Dhumar-Lochana, Chanda, Munda and

Mahikhasur He has defeated in a moment;

Demons like Chamara, Rana-chichhura, Raktichhana

He has slaughtered at a stroke—

With such a Master to protect him, why need this servant fear anything?

In the account of his pre-natal austerities the Guru calls the Lord by the name *Maha-Kal Kalika* (The Eternal Divine Might), which is an exalted form of the name of Durga, but is intended to be, like Rama and Hari and other deity-names to be a name by which the Eternal is designated. *Bhagauti* (Bhagvati), meaning 'Mistress of all prosperity', which is one of the names of Durga, is constantly used by the Guru as one of the synonyms for the Lord as symbolised in the might of the Sword of Righteousness, which is drawn to protect faith and truth against evil.

Thus, there being no theological preoccupations in the minds of the

narrators, the sole aspect of the story of Durga which they were anxious to adumbrate was the crusading or martial aspect. After narrating rapidly and briefly the danger from the power of demons, at which Indra, the King of the gods supplicates Shiva, the mighty Rudra, for help, comes his consort Durga or Chandi into the field against these demons. There are several of them, extremely brave and capable of resuscitating themselves manifold, as their heads are smitten. This is finely allegorical of the inexhaustible and self-proliferating power of evil in the universe against which the Divine Might is constantly warring without quite destroying it finally. This symbolism, in view of its eloquent philosophical significance, is allowed to remain in the Braj versions. The Demons put up a most determined fight, which is described on the pattern of the classical art of war in ancient India, as war with the well-known four wings of the army—foot, horse, elephants and chariots. All manner of ancient weapons of war, familiar to readers of mythological tales, are brought into use. The kites and beasts of prey, like jackals around the gory dead, and the goblins, male and female of Hindu demonology, called Baital, Siddha and Jogini are all brought into the description. The sound effects are eloquent, and in places the descriptions touch great height of the poetic art. The battle rages, with indecisive results in various stages. The demons, who are succeeded by others of their race, die hard, and call forth the utmost heroism and divine aid to finally destroy them. This, no doubt, is particularly emphasized not only for the purpose of poetic effect but also philosophically to symbolize the long-drawn out travail and superhuman courage in the crusader (Dharamvir) to defeat evil, which would not be destroyed in an instant through a miracle.

Demon after demon—Madhu and Kaitabh, Mahikhasur, Dhuma-Nain, Chanda, Munda, Raktabij, Sumbha, Nisumbha—the whole unending demoniac race comes to battle with Durga, and all are ultimately defeated. This is so in the first and second versions in Braj; and so also in the Punjabi version. The pattern of the battle-scenes is somewhat uniform, which is explained by two different poets attempting the theme in the same neo-classical tradition.

The Punjabi version, most certainly of the Guru's own composition, opens with the adoration of the Sword or Divine Might by the name of Bhagauti, the significance of which has been explained above. After offering worship to the Supreme Lord of Creation called herein Bhagauti (the name by which Durga is also known), follows the adoration of the nine Gurus who were Guru Gobind Singh's predecessors. This sequence is significant, inasmuch as the Gurus are and can be put only after God Himself, and no deity, big or small. The omission of the tenth, that is himself, from this roll is because of the humility and modesty characteristic of the Guru's mind, just as of his predecessors when speaking about

themselves. This adoration is further followed by the praise of the Lord who is apostrophized as the creator in the primal age of the Sword, that is Might; later, of the various gods, of the firmament and the earth. Further on, He is described as the creator of the demons and gods—that is, evil no less than good in perpetual battle, and as having willed the destruction of the demons at the hands of Durga. The Lord, gave the strength to Rama to destroy the ten-headed Ravana, and Krishna to hurl to the earth by the hair the tyrant Kansa. Infinite is the Lord, whose knowledge even the saints and mystics who have performed stern austerities for aeons have not been able to compass.

The Guru's faith in the One Lord, and the purely symbolical interpretation of the idea of gods and goddesses and of mythology in general is evident from this, as also from the entire spiritual literature of Sikhism for generations together. This, it is necessary to emphasize, as in the past and even till now, some people have had confused and erroneous notions about the faith of Guru Gobind Singh and his conception of the Supreme Being.

Then follows the account of Indra, harassed by the growing power of the demons, approaching Durga with the appeal for succour. She readily consents to give battle to the evil-doers :

'On hearing Indra's wail Durga laughed a mighty laugh;
She sent for her Lion, destroyer of demons in many a field :
She assured the gods not to be apprehensive—
For the Mighty Mother's ire was aroused the Demons to destroy'.

The drum of battle is struck; terrific is the sound of the myriads of trumpets and bugles blown. The two hosts are ranged on the field. Follows the description of war in expansive many similes :

Heroes were pierced by spikes, like hail-stones* stuck to a tree twig;
Those cut with swords were writhing like men maddened with strong wine;
Some were shaken out of their hiding as is gold separated from pulverized rock;
Maces, tridents, spikes, arrows were speeding with vigour and passion;
Heroes with mighty souls were falling dead like those bitten by black cobras.

...
Came the heroes into battle wave after wave;
Mahikhasur thundered into the field like rain-clouds :
'The mighty Indra himself fled the field before me :
What is this petty Durga to face me in arms?'
Came Mahikhasur into the field with knight of renown.
He unsheathed his mighty two-edged sword.
Rushed the heroes, and great slaughter ensued:

*They cannot be hail-stones. They are a kind of myrobalans (*ānvatās*) 'bir parote barachhi ai jun Lāl chamutai avale'—Editor.

Blood flowed along like the Ganga from Shiva's own locks.
 Was struck the battle drum and the hosts were locked in battle;
 Durga with a lightning jerk drew her sword from the sheath;
 The demon-destroying sword¹ was drawn to kill the devilish brood;
 Smashing through skulls it penetrated their frames,
 Cutting along through the saddle, the horse and the equipage it struck
 into the solid earth—
 Penetrating there-through it struck at the horns of the Terrestrial Bull;
 Splitting the bodies of the foes, it waved over the Tortoise.²

Thus continues this mighty, cosmic war. At one stage as in stanza 25, the demons appear to be about to gain the field, and the gods scurry about in great apprehension. But this only provokes Durga to a further mighty effort, and with her sword 'she cut off the heroes of (the Demon) Dhumar-Nain, like unto a woodcutter felling trees.'

Others of the demon-lords follow, and the classic-mythological Sumbha, Nisumbha, Srawana-Bij 'heroes tall as towers' enter the field.

The demons are killed, but through their heroism in battle are covered with glory. So, After death Srawan-Bij was surrounded by the houris of heaven—each seeking to be the bride of this most noble groom.'

'In a great wrath Kalika (Chandi-Durga) grasped the sword in her right hand;
 And cut into twain several thousands as mighty as the Demon Harinakash;
 Alone she faced their serried ranks—
 Thousands times praised be thy sword-skill !'

As the description warms up, the mythological account merges into the contemporary war scenes, with Mughal and Pathan heroes of the royal forces serving for the demon-foes of Durga. This is no doubt was only a natural slip into what these demons really stood for in the Guru's mind, who through these mythological-fictitious narratives was re-enacting in a war-excited imagination the battle-scenes of his own day :

'Durga the queen grasped her Bhagauti (sword) invoking mighty blessing on it :
 And striking Sumbha the chief it drank his precious life-blood;
 Sumbha fell from his saddle.
 The sword issuing from his wound was dyed in blood,
 As is a princess wearing robes of red.'

Thus ends this heroic tale, whose power is great to annul his transmigration who chants it.' That is so, because invoking noble heroism or crusading for faith is an act of piety equivalent to all the religious

- 1 For the 'sword' in the original the word 'Chandi' is used. This is still another instance of the Guru using this most appealing word to express a variety of meanings, some of which have been explained earlier.
2. The Bull and Tortoise refer here rhetorically to the support of the earth, as imagined in Indian mythology.

practices which according to pious Hinduism release a man from the cycles of births and deaths.

OTHER HEROIC TALES

The heroic theme predominates in all the tales which have been versified by the poets attending the Guru's court. Not only did he particularly emphasize the heroic image of God, even at some risk of arousing misunderstanding as to his faith by using mythological names redolent of heroism (such as Bhagauti, Maha-Kalika and Chandi) for God or the symbols of His Might, but commanded that in all tales from the traditional religious literature in the heroic theme be brought into the greatest prominence. Thus, in 'Ram Avtar', the story of Rama's exile and heroic life, the battle-scenes are numerous, and follow the lines of the Durga-battles. The battles of Rama against the Rakshashas are prolonged and bitter, and full of doubtful moments when victory hung in the balance. This is only true to the pattern of his faith in the inevitable necessity of the bitterest struggle of Good to overthrow Evil.

The most significant heroic tale is that which is woven into the career of Krishna. The Krishana of popular and prevalent Hindu conception is the eternal Wonder Child or Adolescent playing enchanting music and engaged in dalliance in the idyllic surroundings of Braj. Innumerable poets have, and still are poetizing this theme of the youthful, playful Krishna. But in the 'Krishna-Avatar' of Dasam Granth while the traditional scenes are there, and the poet, a traditionalist in spite of his association with the Guru, has depicted that aspect of the Hindu Pan-Apollo even to the limits where it enters the forbidden zone. But he has not omitted to depict also the heroic Krishna, who hurls to the earth from his hair the tyrant Kamsa, oppressor of his father and mother. And nearly half the long narrative of about 2500 stanzas is taken up with the war against Jarasandha—Kamsa's brother-in-law [father-in-law—Editor] and avenger. These battle descriptions are most detailed, with shifting scenes and theatres, and like the final stanzas of Chandi-di-Var, get merged into contemporary battles in defiance of all verisimilitude and chronological consistency. This, of course, is explained the same way. In the mythical battles of Durga, Rama and Krishna the Guru's contemporaries saw the battles against the monsters of their own day, tyrannizing over the land anciently peopled by these gods and heroes. So, with unconscious preoccupation they slip into the contemporary. Into the Krishna-Jarasandha battles are introduced fictitious allies of Jarasandha, princes with medieval and contemporary Rajput names—such for example as Kharag Singh (who alone accounts for 350 stanzas), Amit Singh, Gaj Singh, Dhan Singh, Hari Singh, Ajab Singh, etc. There is among their allies one Achalesh (King of the Hills)—no doubt on unconscious formulation of the hill chiefs in the background of Paonta and Anandpur, ever intriguing and menacing. Then, more

wonderful still, into the Krishna-legend are injected' Muhammadan warriors of the names of Tahir Khan, Sher Khan, Said Khan, Dilawar Khan, Dalel Khan, Ajaib Khan, etc. To a superficial view all this would be a blemish, which perhaps it is. But its significance, which is great, lies in the fact that the re-poetization of these tales by command of the Guru was with the purpose of stirring heroic ardour among a people enervated by a passivist philosophy and an unrealistic mythology. This mythology he revived and harnessed to a great national purpose. He was the crusader (Dharmavir) and to him the India of his day was what Kurukshetra is described in the opening verse of Gita as being—'Dharma-kshetra'—the land where the battle for the triumph of Righteousness was to be fought. He viewed serried before him the Demons—Mahikhasur and all the Ravanaas, the Kamsas and Duryodhanas of his own day. And to fight these he unsheathed the sword, and created the heroic Order of the Khalsa.

OUTLINES OF SIKHISM AND MODERN DIFFICULTIES

TEJA SINGH

The aim of life, according to the Sikh Gurus, is not to get salvation or a heavenly abode called Paradise, but to develop the best in us which is God.

"If a man loves to see God, what cares he for Salvation or Paradise?"¹

(Guru Nanak's *Asa*).

"Everybody hankers after Salvation, Paradise or Elysium, setting their hopes on them every day of their lives. But those who live to see God do not ask for Salvation : The sight itself satisfies their minds completely"²

How to see God and to love Him? The question is taken up by Guru Nanak in his Japuji :

"What shall we offer to Him that we may behold His council-chamber?

What shall we utter with our lips, which may move Him to give us His love?—

In the ambrosial hours of the morn meditate on the grace of the True Name;

For, your good actions may procure for you a better birth, but emancipation is from Grace alone."³

"We should worship the Name, believe in the Name, which is ever and ever the same and true."

The practice of the Name is prescribed again and again in the Sikh Scriptures, and requires a little explanation.

THE NATURE OF GOD OR THE NAME

God is described both as *nirgun*, or absolute, and *sargun*, or personal. Before there was any creation God lived absolutely in Himself, but when He thought of making Himself manifest in creation He became related. In the former case, 'when God was Himself self-created, there was none else; He took counsel and advice with Himself; what He did came to pass. Then there was no heaven, or hell, or the three-regioned world. There was only the Formless One Himself; creation was not then (*Gujri-ki-Var* of Guru Amar Das). There was then no sin, no virtue, no Veda or any other religious book, no caste, no sex (Guru Nanak's *Maru Solhe*, xv, and Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*, xxi). When God became *sargun* or manifest, He became what is called the *Name*, and in order to realise Himself He made Nature wherein He has His seat and 'is diffused everywhere and in all directions in

the form of Love' (Guru Gobind Singh's *Japu*, 80).

In presenting this double phase of the Supreme Being, the Gurus have avoided the pitfalls into which some people have fallen. With them God is not an abstract idea or a moral force, but a personal Being capable of being loved and honoured, and yet He is conceived of as a Being whose presence is diffused all over His creation. He is the common Father of all, fashioning worlds and supporting them from inside, but He does not take birth. He has no incarnations. He Himself stands for the creative agencies, like the *Maya*, the Word and Brahma; he Himself is Truth, Beauty and the eternal yearning of the heart after Goodness (*Japuji*). In a word, the Gurus have combined the Aryan idea of immanence with the Semitic idea of transcendence, without taking away anything from the unity and the personal character of God.

"O ! give me, give some intelligence of my Beloved.

I am bewildered at the different accounts I have of Him.

O happy wives, my companions, say something of Him.

Some say that He is altogether outside the world;

Others that He is altogether contained in it.

His colour is not seen; His features cannot be made out;

O happy wives, tell me truly—

'He lives in everything; He dwells in every heart;

Yet He is not blended with anything: He is separate."⁵

"Why does thou go to the forest in search of God?

He lives of all, is yet ever distinct: He abides with thee too.

As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror,

So does God dwell inside everything; seek Him therefore in the heart."⁶

People who come with preconceived notions to study Sikhism often blunder in offering its interpretation. Those who are conversant with the eastern thought fix upon those passages which refer to the thoughts of immanence and conclude that Sikhism is nothing but an echo of Hinduism, while those who are imbued with the Mohammedan or Christian thought take hold of transcendental passages and identify Sikhism with Islam or Christianity. Others who know both will see here no system, nothing particular, nothing but confusion.

If, however, we were to study Sikhism as a new organic growth evolved from the existing systems of thought to meet the needs of a newly evolving humanity, we would find no difficulty in recognizing Sikhism as a distinct system of thought.

Take, for instance, Guru Nanak's *Asa-di-Var*, which in its preliminary stanzas lays down the fundamentals of Sikh belief about God. It is a trenchant clear-cut *monotheism*. God is called 'the in-dweller of Nature, and is described as filling all things 'by an art that is artless' (xii. 1-2). He is not an impotent mechanic fashioning pre-existing matter into the universe. He does not exclude matter, but includes and transcends it.

The universe too is not an illusion. Being rooted in God who is real, it is a reality; not a reality final and abiding, but a reality on account of God's presence in it (ii. 1). His Will is above Nature as well as working within it, and in spite of its immanence it acts not as an arbitrary force but as a personal presence working 'most intelligently' (iii. 2). The first thing about God is that He is indivisibly one, above every other being, however highly conceived, such as Vishnu, Brahma, or Shiva (i), or as Rama and Krishna (iv. 2). The second thing is that He is the highest moral being (ii. 2), who has inscribed all men with His Name or moral presence (ii). He is not a God belonging to any particular people, Muslim or Hindu, but is 'the dispenser of life universal' (vi). The ways to realize Him are not many, but only one (xii. 3), and that way is not knowledge, formalism (xiv. 2., xv. 1-4), or what are received as meritorious actions which establish a claim to reward (viii. 2), but love (xiii. 2) and faith (xiv. 2), the aim being to obtain the grace of God (iv. 2., v. 2., viii. 2., xiii. 1). The only way of worshipping Him is to sing His praises (vi. 1., vii. ix., xii. 2., xix. 2., xxii. 3) and to meditate on His Name (ii., viii. 1, ix. 2., xvi. 1).

UPLIFT OF MAN BASED ON CHARACTER

This life of praise is not to be of idle mysticism, but of active service done in the midst of wordly relations. "There can be no worship without good actions."⁸ These actions, however, are not to be formal deeds of so-called merit, but should be inspired by an intense desire to please God and to serve fellow-men.

"Without pleasing God all actions are worthless.

Repetition of mantras, austerities, set ways of living, or deeds of merit leave us destitute even before our journey ends.

You won't get even half a copper for your fasts and special programmes of life.

These things, O brother, won't do there : for, the requirements of that way are quite different.

You won't get a place there for all your bathing and wandering in different places.

These means are useless; they cannot satisfy the conditions of that world.

Are you a reciter of all the four Vedas? There is no room for you there.

With all your correct reading, if you don't understand one thing that matters, you only bother yourself.

I say, Nanak, if you *exert* yourself in action, you will be saved.

Serve your God and remember Him, leaving all your pride of self."⁹

The Gurus laid the foundation of man's uplift, not on such short-cuts as mantras, miracles or mysteries, but on man's own humanity, his own character; as it is character alone,—the character already formed—which helps us in moral crises. Life is like a cavalry march. The officer of a cavalry on march has to decide very quickly when to turn his men to the

right or left. He cannot wait until his men are actually on the brink of a *nulla* or *khud*. He must decide long before that. In the same way, when face to face with an evil, we have to decide quickly. Temptations allow us no time to think. They always come suddenly. When offered a bribe or an insult, we have to decide at once what course of action we are going to take. We cannot *then* consult a religious book or a moral guide. We must decide on the impulse. And this can be done only if virtue has so entered into our disposition that we are habitually drawn towards it, and evil has got no attraction for us. Without securing virtue sufficiently in character, even some of the so-called great men have been known to fall an easy prey to temptation. It was for this reason that for the formation of character the Gurus did not think it sufficient to lay down rules of conduct in a book; they also thought it necessary to take in hand a whole people for a continuous course of schooling in wisdom and experience, spread over many generations, before they could be sure that the people thus trained had acquired a character of their own. This is the reason why in Sikhism there have been ten founders, instead of only one.

Before the Sikh Gurus, the leaders of thought had fixed certain grades of salvation, according to the different capacities of men, whom they divided into high and low castes. The development of character resulting from this was one-sided. Certain people, belonging to the favoured classes, got developed in them a few good qualities to a very high degree, while others left to themselves got degenerate. It was as if a gardener, neglecting to look after all the different kinds of plants entrusted to him, were to bestow all his care on a few chosen ones, which were in bloom, so that he might be able to supply a few flowers every day for his master's table. The Gurus did not want to have such a lop-sided growth. They wanted to give opportunities of highest development to all the classes of people.

"There are lowest men among the low castes.

Nanak, I shall go with them. What have I got to do with the great?

God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly."¹⁰

Some work had already been done in this line. The Bhagats or reformers in the Middle Ages had tried to abolish the distinction between the high-class Hindus and the so-called untouchables, by taking into their fold such men as barbers, weavers, shoe-makers, etc. But the snake of untouchability still remained unscotched; because the privilege of equality was not extended to men as men, but to those individuals only who had washed off their untouchability with the love of God. Kabir, a weaver, and Ravidas, a shoemaker, were honoured by kings and high-caste men, but the same privilege was not extended to other weavers and shoemakers, who were still held as untouchables. Ravidas took pride in the fact that the love of God had so lifted him out of his caste that even "the superior sort of Brahmins came to bow before him," while the other members of his caste.

who were working as shoe-makers in the suburbs of Benares, were not so honoured.¹¹

The Sikh Gurus made this improvement on the previous idea that they declared the whole humanity to be one and that a man was to be honoured, not because he belonged to this or that caste or creed, but because he was a man, an emanation from God, who had given him the same senses and the same soul as to other men :

"Recognize all human nature as one."

"All men are the same, although they appear different under different influences.

The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful, the Hindus and the Muslims, have developed themselves according to the fashions of different countries.

All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build—a compound of the same four elements."¹²

Such a teaching could not tolerate any ideas of caste or untouchability. Man rose in the estimation of man. Even those who had been considering themselves as the dregs of society and whose whole generations had lived as grovelling slaves of the so-called higher classes, came to be fired with a new hope and courage to lift themselves as equals of the best of humanity.

Women too received their due. "How can they be called inferior," says Guru Nanak, "when they give birth to kings and prophets?"¹³ Women as well as men share in the grace of God and are equally responsible for their actions to Him. Guru Hargobind called woman "the conscience of man." Sati was condemned by the Sikh Gurus long before any notice was taken of it by Akbar.¹⁴

The spirit of man was raised with a belief that he was not a helpless creature in the hands of a Being of an arbitrary will, but was a responsible being endowed with a will of his own, with which he could do much to mould his destiny. Man does not start his life with a blank character. He has already existed before he is born here. He inherits his own past as well as that of his family and race. All this goes to the making of his being and has a share in the moulding of his nature. But this is not all. He is given a will with which he can modify the inherited and acquired tendencies of his past and determine his coming conduct. If this were not so, he would not be responsible for his actions. This will, again, is not left helpless or isolated; but if through the Guru's Word it be attuned to the Supreme Will, it acquires a force with which he can transcend all his past and acquire a new character.

This question of human will as related to the Divine Will is an intricate one and requires a little elucidation.

According to Sikhism, the ultimate source of all that is in us is God alone. Without Him there is no strength in us. Nobody, not even the evil

man, can say that he can do anything independent of God. Everything moves within the Providential domain.

Thou art a river in which all beings move :

There is none but Thee around them.

All living things are playing within Thee.¹⁵

The fish may run against the current of the river or along with it, just as it likes, but it cannot escape the river itself. Similarly man may run counter to what is received as good or moral, but he can never escape from the pale of God's Will.

Then who is responsible for his actions? Man himself, we learn from the first *salok* of *Asa-di-Var's* 7th *pauri* that man is given free will, which leads him to do good or evil actions, to think good or evil thoughts and to go in consequence to Heaven or Hell :

"Governed by his free will he laughs or weeps :

Of his free will he begrimes or washes himself;

Of his free will he degrades himself from the order of human beings;

Of his free will he befool himself or becomes wise."

In the next *salok* we read :

"Self-assertion gives man his individuality and leads him to action :

It also ties him down to the world and sends him on a round of births and deaths.

Wherefrom comes this assertion of self? How shall it leave us?

It comes to man from the Will of God and determines his conduct according to his antecedents.

It is a great disease: but its remedy also lies within itself.

When God sends grace to man, he begins to obey the call of the Guru.

Nanak says: Hear ye all, this is the way to cure the disease."¹⁶

The source of evil is not Satan or Ahrman, or any other external agency. It is our own sense of Ego placed by God in us. It may prove a boon a curse to us, accordingly as we subject ourselves to God's Will or not. It is the overweening sense of self that grows as a barrier between God and man and keeps him wandering from sin to sin—

"The bride and the bridegroom live together with a partition of ego between them."¹⁷

The infinite is within us, 'engraved in our being,' like a cypher which is gradually unfolding its meaning as we listen to the voice of the Teacher. It is like the light of the sun over present, but shut out of our sight by the cloud of ignorance and selfishness. We sin as long as this light remains unmanifested and we believe in our own self as everything to us.

Regeneration comes when, at the call of Grace, we begin to subject our tiny self to the highest Self, that is God, and our own will is gradually attuned to His Supreme Will, until we feel and move just as He wishes us to feel and move.

Really the problem of good and evil is the problem of Union and

Disunion¹⁸ with God. All things are strung on God's Will, and man among them. As long as man is conscious of this, he lives and moves in union with Him. But gradually led away by the overweening sense of self he cuts himself away from that unity and begins to wander in moral isolation. It is, however, so designed in the case of man that whenever he wishes he can come back to the bosom of his Father and God and resume his position there. Guru Nanak says in *Maru* :

"By the force of Union we meet God and enjoy Him even with this body;

And by the force of Disunion we break away from Him :

But, Nanak, it is possible to be united again."

When we come into this world, we begin our life with a certain capital. We inherit our body from our parents, and there are divine things in us, as 'the spirit and progressive tendencies,' which serve as forces of Union and keep us united with God. But there are also evil tendencies in us inherited from our past lives which serve as forces of disunion and draw us away from Him towards moral death. Cf. Guru Nanak in *Maru* :

"Man earns his body from the union of his mother and father :

And the Creator inscribes his being with the gifts of the spirit and progressive tendencies.

But led away by delusion he forgets himself.¹⁹

This teaching about the freedom of will and 'progressive tendencies' raises the spirit of man and gives him a new hope and courage. But that is not enough to enable him to resist evil and to persist in positive virtue. The temptation of evil is so strong and the human powers for resisting it,—in spite of the inherent progressive tendencies,—are so weak that it is practically impossible for him to fulfil that standard of virtue which is expected of him. It was this consciousness of human weakness which made Farid say :

"The bride is so weak in herself, the Master so stern in His commands."²⁰

That is, man is endowed with such weak faculties that he stumbles at each step, and yet it is expected of him that—

"He should always speak the truth, and never tell lies."* (Farid)

"He should beware even of an unconscious sin." (Guru Tegh Bahadur)

"He should not step on the bed of another's wife even in dream." (Guru Gobind Singh)²¹

These commands cannot be fulfilled simply with the strength of knowledge and inherited tendencies. They will not go far even in resisting evil. The higher ideal of leading a life of positive virtue and sacrifice is absolutely impossible with such a weak equipment. Then what is to be done?

The prophets of the world have given many solutions of this problem. Some get round the difficulty by supposing that there is no evil. It is only a whim or a false scare produced by our ignorance. They believe in the efficacy of knowledge. Others believe in the efficacy of austerities; still

others in alms given in profusion to overwhelm the enormity of sin. There are, again, a higher sort of teachers who inculcate the love of some great man as a saviour. What was the solution offered by the Sikh Gurus?

They saw that, although it was difficult for a man to resist evil and to do good with his own powers, yet if he were primed with another personality possessing dynamic powers, he could acquire a transcendental capacity for the purpose. This personality was to be the Guru's.

THE GURU IN SIKHISM

The way of religion, as shown by Sikhism, is not a set of views or doctrines, but a way of life lived according to a definite *model*. It is based, not on rules or laws, but upon discipleship. In the career of the disciple the personality of the Guru is all along operative, commanding his whole being and shaping his life to its diviner issues. Without such a personality there would be no cohesion, no direction in the moral forces of society, and in spite of a thousand kinds of knowledge 'there would still be utter darkness.'²² There would be no force to connect men with men and them with God. Everybody would exist for himself in moral isolation, 'like spurious sesames left desolate in the field' 'with a hundred masters to own them.'²³ It is the Guru who removes the barriers of caste and position set up by men among themselves and gathering them all upto himself unites them with God.²⁴ In this way foundations are laid of a society of the purified who as an organized force strive for the good of the whole mankind.

Such a creative personality must be perfect, because 'men take after whom they serve.'²⁵ If the ideal person is imperfect, the society and its individuals following him will also get imperfect development. But 'those who serve the saved ones, will be saved.'

The Sikh Gurus were perfect, and are described as such in the Sikh Scriptures. Guru Nanak himself says in *Siri Rag* : "Everybody else is subject to error only the Guru and God are without error. And Guru Arjan says in *Bhairon* : "Whoever is seen is defective; without any defect is my true Guru, the Yogi." The state of perfection attained by the Gurus is lucidly described in the eighth and the eighteenth octaves of Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*. The same Guru says in *Asa*.

God does not die, nor do I fear death.
He does not perish, nor do I grieve.
He is not poor, nor do I have hunger.
He has no pain, nor have I any trouble.
There is no destroyer but God,
Who is my life and who gives me life.
He has no bond, nor have I got any.
He has no entanglement, nor have I any care.
As He is stainless, so am I free from stain.
As he is happy, so am I always rejoicing.

He has no anxiety, nor have I any concern.
 As He is not defiled, so am I not polluted.
 As He has no craving, so do I covet nothing.
 He is pure and I too suit Him in this.
 I am nothing : He alone is everything.
 All around is the same He.
 Nanak, the Guru had destroyed all my superstition and defects.
 And I have become uniformly one with Him.²⁶

The Guru is sinless. In order, however, to be really effective in saving man, he must not be above man's capacity to imitate, as he would be if he were a supernatural being. His humanity must be real and not feigned. He should have a nature subject to the same laws as operate in the ordinary human nature, and should have attained his perfection through the same Grace as is available to all men and through perfect obedience to God's Will. The Sikh Gurus had fought with sin and had overcome it. Some of them had lived for a long time in error, until Grace touched them and they were perfected through a constant discipline of knowledge, love and experience in the association of their Gurus. When they had been completely attuned to the Will divine and were sanctified as Gurus, there remained no defect in them and they became perfect and holy. There-after sins did come to tempt them, but they never gave way and were always able to overcome them. It is only thus that they became perfect exemplars of men and transformed those who came under their influence to veritable angelic beings.

THE GURU IN THE SIKH

This transformation comes not only through close association with the Guru, which is found in many other religions, but through the belief that the Sikh incorporates the Guru. He fills himself with the Guru and then feels himself linked up with an inexhaustible source of power. A Sikh, a pure-hearted Sikh, who follows the teachings of his Guru is a great power in himself; but when such a Sikh gets into himself the dynamic personality of such a perfect exemplar as Guru Gobind Singh, his powers acquire an infinite reach and he becomes a superman. He is called "Khalsa," the personification of the Guru himself. "The Khalsa," says the Guru, "is my other self; in him I live and have my being." A single Sikh, a mere believer, is only one; but the equation changes when he takes Guru Gobind Singh into his embrace. He becomes equal to 'one lakh and a quarter,' in the Sikh parlance. This change occurs not only in his physical fitness, but also in his mental and spiritual outlook. His nature is so reinforced in every way that although hundreds may fall round him, he will resist to the last and never give way. Wherever he stands, he will stand as 'a garrison of the Lord of Hosts,' a host in himself—a host of one lakh and a quarter. He will keep the Guru's flag always flying. Whenever

tempted, he will ask himself, "Can I lower the flag of Guru Gobind Singh? Can I desert it? I, as Budh Singh or Kahan Singh, can fall; but can Guru Gobind Singh in me fall? No, never." This feeling of incorporation with the Guru makes the Sikh strong beyond any ordinary powers and in times of emergency comes to his rescue long before he can remember anything relevant to the occasion recorded in history or scripture. Bhai Joga Singh's case is just in point. He was a devoted Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, and had received baptism from the hands of the Guru himself. He was so loyal that when he received an urgent call from the Guru to proceed to Anandpur, he hastened from Peshawar without a moment's delay, not waiting even to see his own marriage through. And yet in moment of weakness, this paragon of Sikh purity was going to fall, fall at the door of a public woman of Hoshiarpur. Who saved him in that emergency? It was the vision of Guru Gobind Singh, re-establishing the personal contact by pointing out the signs of personation worn on his body, and reminding him that he was carven in the Guru's own image.

THE GURU IN THE PANTH

So far we have considered what the Guru does for the Sikhs as individuals. We have seen how he intensifies their character and increases their power thousandfold by filling their personalities with his own. In order to increase this power immensely more, the Guru made another arrangement. He organized them into *Sangats* or Holy Assemblies, and put his personality again into them. This led to a very remarkable development in the institution of Guruship and no description of Guruship will be complete without an account of this development.

The Sikh idea of religion, as we have seen, was something more practical than merely mystic. It was to consist of the practice of *Nam* and *Seva*. To practise *Nam* means to practise the presence of God by keeping Him ever in our minds by singing His praises or dwelling on His excellences. This is to be done not only when alone in solitude, but also in public, where worship of the Name is made more-impressive by being organized in the form of congregational recitations or singing. The other element is *Seva* or Service. The idea of service is that it should be not only liberal, but also efficient and economical; that is, it should do the greatest good with the least possible means. It should not be wasteful. We do not set up a sledge-hammer to crack a nut, or send a whole army to collect revenue. We have to be economical in our efforts, however charitable they may be. For this purpose we have to organize our means. In every work of practical nature, in which more than one person is engaged, it is necessary to resort to organization. As religion too—especially a religion like Sikhism whose aim is to serve mankind—belongs to the same category, it requires organization of its followers as an essential condition of its

success. It may not be necessary in the case of an individualistic religion, wherein the highest aim is to vacate the mind of all desires, or to dream away the whole life in jungles or mountains; but where religion consists in realizing God mainly through service done within the world, where men have constantly to deal with men to promote each other's good, it is impossible to do without organization.

Guru Nanak had therefore begun with two things in his religious work : the holy Word and the organized Fellowship.²⁷ This organised fellowship is called *Sangat*. The idea of *Sangat* or holy Fellowship led to the establishment of Local assemblies led by authorised leaders called *Masands*. Every Sikh was supposed to be a member of one or other of such organizations. The Guru was the central unifying personality and, in spite of changes in succession, was held to be one and the same as his predecessors. The love existing between the Guru and the Sikhs was more intense than has ever existed between the most romantic lovers of the world. But the homage paid to the Guru was made impersonal by creating a mystic unity between the Sikh and the Guru on the one hand and the Guru and the Word on the other.²⁸ Greatest respect began to be paid to the incorporated Word, even the Guru choosing for himself a seat lower than that of the Scripture. The only form of worship was the meditation on and the singing of the Word.²⁹ The Sikh assemblies also acquired great sanctity, owing to the belief that the spirit of the Guru lived and moved among them. They began to assume higher and higher authority, until collectively the whole body, called the *Panth*, came to be regarded as an embodiment of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh himself received baptism from the Sikhs initiated by himself. After him the Sikhs ceased to have any personal Guru. If we read the Sikh history aright, the Sikh community would appear as an organized unit to have undergone a course of discipline in the hands of ten Gurus, until its character was fully developed and the Guru merged his personality in the body of the nation thus reared. The Guru, as mentioned above, worked with two things : the personal association and the Word. Now after the death of Guru Gobind Singh the personality and the Word were separated. The *Panth* was invested with the personality of the Guru, and the incorporated Word became the *Gyan* Guru. That is, in simple words, the Khalsa *Panth* was to be the Guru in future, not in supersession of the previous Gurus, but as authorised to work in their name; and it was invariably to guide itself by the teachings of the Gurus as found in the Holy Granth. So that the Sikhs came to name Guru Nanak and the Guru *Panth* in the same breath.

Amrit or baptism was made the basis of this organization. There was no room left for any wavering on the border-line. All who wanted to serve humanity through Sikhism must join it seriously as regular members, and receive its baptism as the initial step. All must have the same creed, which

should be well-defined and should not be confused with the belief and practices of the neighbouring religions. The Guru ordered that—

The Khalsa should be distinct from the Hindu and the Muslim."

(Rahitnama of Chaupa Singh).

"He who keeps alight the unquenchable torch of truth, and never swerves from the thought of one God;

He who has full love and confidence in God, and does not put his faith, even by mistake, in fasting or the graves of Muslim saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Jogis' places of sepulchre;

He who only recognizes the one God and no pilgrimages, non-destruction of life, penances, or austerities;

And in whose hearth the light of the Perfect One shines—he is to be recognized as a pure member of the Khalsa."

(Svaiyyas of Guru Gobind Singh).

Such a Khalsa was to embody in himself the highest ideal of manhood, as described by Guru Gobind Singh in his unpublished book, called *Sarb Loh**. Although the Khalsa was designed by the Guru himself, yet the Guru was so charmed by the look of his own creation that he saluted it, in the book, as his own ideal and master. The Khalsa was thought fit enough to administer baptism of the new order to the Guru, and was consecrated as the incarnate. As a sign that the Guru had placed himself eternally in his Sikhs, it was declared by him that—

"If anybody wishes to see me, let him go to an assembly of Sikhs, and approach them with faith and reverence; he will surely see me amongst them."

(Prem Sumarg)

In the ranks of the Khalsa, all were equal, the lowest with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes. Women were to be baptized in the same way as men and were to enjoy the same rights. The "Sarbāt Khalsa," or the whole people, met once at the Akal Takht, Amritsar, the highest seat of Panthic authority, on the occasion of Divali or Baisakhi, and felt that they were one. All questions affecting the welfare of the community were referred to the *Sangats*, which would decide them in the form of resolutions called *Gurmattas*. A *Gurmatta* duly passed was supposed to have received the sanction of the Guru, and any attempt made afterwards to contravene it was taken as a sacrilegious act.

FORMS AND CEREMONIES

This institution of the Khalsa entails a certain additional disciplinary outfit in the shape of baptismal forms and vows, which are often misunderstood. It is true that if religion were only a matter of individual concern, there would be no need of forms and ceremonies. But religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennobles individuals but also binds them together to work for nobility in the world. Organization is a means of enlarging the possibility, scope and effectiveness of this work. In

*Now it stands published—Editor..

order that an organization itself may work effectively, it is necessary that the individuals concerned in it should be able to keep up their attachment to the cause and a sufficient amount of enthusiasm for it. It is, however, a patent fact that men by their nature are so constituted that they cannot keep their feelings equally high-strung for a long time at a stretch. Reaction is inevitable, unless some means are devised to ensure the continuity of exertion. This is where discipline comes in, which keeps up the spirit of individuals against relaxation in times of trial and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in moments of ebb. This discipline, or what is called *esprit de corps*, is secured by such devices as flags and drills and uniforms in armies, and certain forms and ceremonies in religion. Uniformity is an essential part of them. They create the necessary enthusiasm by appealing to imagination and sentiment, and work for it in moments of depression. They are a real aid to religion, which is essentially a thing of sentiment. Man would not need them if he were only a bundle of intellectual and moral senses; but as he has also got sentiment and imagination, without which the former qualities would be inoperative, he cannot do without articulating his ideas and beliefs in some forms appropriate to sentiment. These forms must not be dead but a living index of his ideal, waking up in him vivid intimations of the personality that governs his religion. They should be related to his inner belief as words are to their meaning, tears to grief, smiles to happiness and a tune to a song. It is true that sometimes words become meaningless, when we no longer heed their sense, or the language to which they belong becomes dead. It is true that sometimes tears and smiles are only cloaks for hypocrisy, and a tune mere meaningless jingle. But there is no denying the fact that, when their inner meaning is real and we are sincere about it, they do serve as very helpful interpreters. Forms are the art of religion. Like Art in relation to Nature, these forms impose certain limitations on the ideal, but at the same time they make the ideal more real and workable for general use.

Sometimes, however, when the forms are determined, not by the necessity of uniformity which is so essential for discipline, but by local or racial causes, they narrow the applicability of the ideal and create division and exclusiveness where they should have helped men to unite. When the spirit in which they had been originally conceived dies out, they become mere handicaps to religion, and the people who use them would be well-advised to abandon them. It was such forms that Guru-Nanak asked people to leave. "Destroy that custom," he said, "which makes you forget dear God."³⁰ But the Sikh forms were not conceived in a spirit of exclusiveness, or as essential to the advancement of individual souls. They were simply appointed to serve as aids to the preserving of the corporate life of the community, and any man who likes to serve humanity through the Sikh Panth can wear them. It is possible for a man to love God and cultivate his

individual soul without adopting these forms; but if he wants to work in a systematic manner, not only for his own advancement but for the good of others as well in the company of Sikhs, he must adopt these disciplinary forms of their organization. The Sikhs, who are the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh and whose religion is surcharged with his personality, find the uniform worn and ordained by him as a real help in playing their part as units of the Panthic organization. This help comes from the appeal made to sentiment by the process of association and not through any inherent efficacy of the forms themselves. This association is not with places or things, but with an ever-living personality that is itself a symbol of the Highest Personality. As is God, so is the Guru; and as is the Guru, so must be the follower. Wearing a *Kicker ensuring briskness of movement at times of action and serving as an easy underwear at times of rest, an iron ring on his right arm as a sign of sternness and constraint and a sword by his side as an instrument of offence and defence and as an emblem of power and dignity, the Guru presented an impressive picture of a simple but disciplined soldier. He, however, combined in him the saintliness of the old Rishies with the sternness and strength of a knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept long hair, which all the world over have always been associated with saintliness. A comb was a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These are the forms with which the Sikhs are invested at the time of their baptism, in order to look exactly like their master, as they are to behave exactly like him.

From the history of Sikhs in the past as well as in the present, it is quite evident how effectively these baptismal forms, with the accompanying vows of purity, love and service, have aided them in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of the greatest trial. While keeping the Sikhs associated with their Guru and maintaining his spirit amongst them, they have not produced any narrowing effect on their beliefs or modes of worship. All worship and ceremony, whether in temple or home, whether on birth, marriage or death, consists of nothing else but praying and chanting hymns. Could anything be simpler?

MODERN DIFFICULTIES OF SIKHISM

I. CONCERNING PANTHIC ORGANISATION

The present is a time of revival; and, as during the time of their fall Sikhs had completely forgotten themselves, they have now to rediscover practically all their institutions. They are availing themselves of the tradition, imperfectly preserved in the army, or at the *takhts*, which are the traditional seats of religious authority at Amritsar, Anandpur, Patna, and Nanded (Deccan), or as recorded in the *Rahatnamas* and other historical

literature; but the material available is very scanty and there is great scope for the use of imagination in reconstructing the past tradition. There being a great lack of education among the Sikhs, their imagination is not always used to the best advantage in the work of reconstruction, and there being no one central body to give unity and coherence to their religious decisions, there are appearing among certain impatient reformers some very strange and anomalous customs and institutions quite alien to the liberal spirit of the Khalsa. But the mass of the intelligent leaders are wisely checking themselves from any hasty reform of the doctrine, and are very busy in promoting mass education and temple reform, and in trying to secure a central representative body for all Sikhs. They have made great strides in education and their progress in this direction, if it were unchecked by the Educational Department, would be very rapid. As a result of strong agitation, carried on with unprecedented sacrifice, they have obtained control over most of the historical Gurdwaras, or temples, and have secured a law to help them to obtain control over the remaining ones, whose possession is yet disputed. To exercise this control, they have been provided with a central assembly, freely elected with the vote of every adult Sikh, man and woman. The right of vote accorded to women is likely to produce most far-reaching results, as this gives them a share in the deliberations of the highest association of the community in charge of the temples and the ritual. This association, however, has only a limited scope of work, and cannot guide and control all the activities of the Panth. And the Sikhs are in several minds as to whether they should have another association, wielding a higher and more comprehensive authority, or they should content themselves with the one already obtained for the control of Gurdwaras.

The question of having a supreme Panthic body is most important. At the death of the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, when the Sikhs got spiritual home rule and, wielding the power and authority of the Panth, became masters of their own destiny, they had to dispense with the personal leadership of one man. It was inevitable that, for the exercise of corporate authority, they should create for themselves a central body; but somehow it has not been possible for them up to this day to succeed in providing themselves with this most elementary necessity. In the beginning, when they were left to themselves, they loosely followed the Greek method of the direct participation of every individual in the counsels of the Panth, and for this purpose had yearly or half-yearly gatherings of the *Sarbatt Khalsa* (the whole people) at the Akal Takht. When persecutions became rife, however, these meetings were impossible, and the authority came to rest solely in the Akal Takht. During the rule of the Misals, the numbers of the *Sarbatt Khalsa* became unwieldy and it was necessary to have some system of representation; but the general ignorance

and the newly-acquired lust for power had corrupted the democratic genius of the people, and there appeared on the scene a man of supreme influence in the person of Ranjit Singh, whose ambition was to give the Sikhs an empire similar in power and dignity to that of the Mugals and whose imperialism did not encourage him "to think along the lines of representative institutions. During his time no central association or parliament was possible. The people in the meanwhile had lost all hold on the first principles of Sikhism, what to say of its institutions, and, when their rule was supplanted by the British, they were too degenerate and broken-hearted to think of representative assemblies. With the coming of education and a knowledge of Western institutions, the Sikhs too began to form *diwans*, or associations, to take in hand the work of education and social and religious reform. Owing, however, to the instinctive self-assertion of the Sikhs and to the lack of a wholesale awakening among them, which could be possible only with mass education, no one association was able to take the central place among them. The suffering of the six years (1921-26), however, has welded them together as nothing else did before, and in matters of religion they have learnt to obey one central body. The new law of temples has given them, for the first time in their history, an association representative of their whole community; but, as I have said before, it cannot take the place of the central body, which should wield the *whole* authority of the Panth.

Should they have a separate body for this purpose? There is some difficulty in achieving this. The main point at issue is whether politics should or should not be included in the scope of its work. In order to make this difficulty of the Sikh organisation clear it is necessary to throw some light on its relation with the State.

Guru Gobind Singh at a time of peace had exhorted his Sikhs to recognise the house of Babar as supreme in worldly power, just as they recognised the house of Guru Nanak as supreme in religion. (*Bachitra Natak*, XIII. 9). Yet, owing to certain unfortunate developments in history, the constitution of the Panth does not contemplate the acceptance of superiority of any earthly power outside its pale. During the last 300 years, during which their institutions have grown and developed, the Sikhs have seldom had any chance to work in co-operation with any government other than their own. Either they have been in conflict with the ruling powers or they have been ruling themselves.* It is only since 1849 that they have had occasion to serve under a friendly government. But then they have had no political status of their own, nor have they been fully self-conscious. It is only quite recently that they have witnessed the growth of their institutions

*Even Maharaja Ranjit Singh sometimes found himself in very awkward situations when the Akalis wanted to assert the law of the Panth against him. But he knew how to get over these difficulties by humouring the Akalis and keeping up the forms of the Panthic Law.

to their full stature, and with it has come the old conflict. The Sikhs must boldly face the fact that their organisation, if revived strictly on its original lines, must clash with the government of the land, or, for that matter, with any other organisation that is not Sikh. For each Sikh, having personal relations with the Panth as Guru, must in all cases give his first obedience to it. Therefore, whenever there is a difference with any body other than the Panth, there is no possibility of compromising the Panth, as it would be lowering the flag of Guru Gobind Singh. This gives strength and makes the Sikhs unbending under the stress of greatest suffering; but it also obliges them to be uncompromising whenever their collective will expressed in *gurmatta* form is opposed to another will. This is all right in religion, which admits of no conscious compromises with outsiders, because there we have to deal with doctrines and dogmas which are exclusive and fixed; but in politics or other worldly matter, where things are not absolutely sectarian but have to be shared in common with others, and where the co-operation of other communities is essential, an uncompromising attitude does not always succeed, and has often to be modified to suit the conveniences and prejudices of others. But a *gurmatta* is a *gurmatta*, and having once received the sanction of the Guru Panth admits of no give-and-take from any non-Sikh power.

This was exemplified during the Akali agitation, when the Sikh leaders could not hold any direct communication with the Government on the question of the Gurdwara Bill, because a *gurmatta*, to the effect that unless prisoners were released first no talk was to be held with the Government, stood in their way. This created differences, because most of the leaders were convinced of the futility of the resolution, and therefore in the end, after much suffering, they had to resort to indirect negotiations with the Government. Hence most of the compromises made with the Government were secret entered into by the leaders, but kept veiled from the eyes of the general public, to escape from the stigma of lowering the prestige of the *gurmatta*. This is responsible for the present split between the Sikh masses, who, following the old spirit, are uncompromising, and their more intelligent leaders, who see reason in making compromises for the Panth, when necessary, even when the letter of the *gurmattas* stands in their way.

The best way out of the difficulty would be to modify the constitution in the light of the present circumstances, to confine the *gurmatta* only to those matters which are strictly religious and to separate from them the political matters, for which mere *mattas* or resolutions carrying more earthly prestige should be passed. Two main circumstances justify this change. In the first place, our political outlook has changed radically since the days when the foundations of the Panth were laid. In those days the Khalsa was completely independent : God above and the Panth below, with

no earthly power to intervene. Now even the most free-minded Sikh is in favour of the British connection, or at least in favour of *swaraj*, which means the rule not of the Sikhs alone, but of all Indians—Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh. In those days the country could belong to one party only, either Hindu, or Sikh or Muslim; but now patriotism has changed its meaning, and has come to include love for the rights of other communities besides our own. Many questions which were supposed to belong exclusively to the Sikh community are now of equal concern to other communities as well, and have therefore passed out of the jurisdiction of the Panth. The question of the Punjabi language, for example, which the Sikhs had made a particular concern of their own, must now pass to some society representing the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There was a time when, on a complaint being received from a Brahmin that his wife had been taken away by the Nawab of Kasur, the Misals gathered at once at the Akal Takht, espoused the cause of the afflicted husband, and sent out an expedition to avenge the wrong and restore the bride. If such a case occurred now it would have to be handed over to the police; that is, the authority of a separate power other than that of the Panth must be recognised to deal with it. Many troubles are destined to arise between the Government and the Sikhs unless this distinction is recognised, and the sooner the better. The leaders of Sikh thought owe it as a duty to their community to disillusion the masses and lay before them clearly the definite change that has been brought about in their political conceptions, and the consequent necessity of recognising a change in the ideas of their Panthic organisation.

2. CONCERNING SECTS

The belief of the Sikhs that "there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation"³¹ does not allow them—at least theoretically—to have any sects among them. Sects arise in those religions where no arrangement is made to secure the permanency of Guruship. When the founder dies, leaving nothing behind but his Word, he begins to be interpreted differently by his followers, and in the course of time sects arise as a result of these differences. In Sikhism, however, a peculiar arrangement was made by which no differences were to be allowed in doctrine or its interpretation. The Guru was always one, and always alive. This was not possible physically. So it was designed that with the change of the Guru the spirit should not change. "The spirit was the same, and so was the method; the Master merely changed his body" (*Var Satta*).

As long as the Gurus were personally present they did not allow any change in the doctrine, nor did they allow any new centres to be formed within the pale of Sikhism. Whenever anybody tried to found a schism, he and his followers were thrown out. That was the fate of the Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramraiya, etc. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh the

whole Sikh community, as a collective unit, was invested with the authority of the Guru, and was to guide itself in the light of the Word incorporated in the Holy Granth. It meant that the Word for the guidance of the community was the same as before, only its interpreter had changed his body. Instead of being one person he had assumed the shape of a corporate body, called the Panth.

Owing to certain historical causes this principle of Panthic Guruship has had no chance of working effectively, with the result that many sects have arisen in Sikhism and the Sikhs do not know what to do with them. If after Guru Gobind Singh the Sikhs had instituted a central assembly to exercise the right of personal guidance in the name of the Guru, there would have been no differences in interpretation, and no sects would have been formed round those interpretations. But there being no central authority to check or control, unite or coordinate, there have arisen certain orders of preachers or missionaries who in the course of time have assumed the form of sects. Such are the Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewapanthis, Namdharis, Nirankaris, etc.

What is to be done with them? If the Sikhs exercise their collective authority in the name of the Panth as Guru, they cannot tolerate the existence of separate centres, having their own Gurus and their own interpretations of the doctrine. If, on the other hand, they allow the schisms to continue unchecked, their own authority, their own principle of Panthic Guruship is undermined, and they can make no progress with uncertain or divided doctrine.

In my view the remedy is not to throw out all those who differ from the Singh Sabha form of Sikhism, but to tolerate their differences for some time until we are able to remove the cause which has given rise to these sects. We should give a definite shape to the principle of Panthic Guruship, which has been so long kept in abeyance. Let us recognise one body as the central authority for the whole community. Is it to be the S.G.P.C. or the Chief Khalsa Diwan? If no agreement is possible on any one of these, then a separate body should be created to assume the accredited position of the Guru Panth, which alone can claim the allegiance of the whole community. Many of the existing sects will not be able to reconcile themselves to the rule of the S.G.P.C., which as custodian of temples may have given them many a cause of difference. Even the reformed sections of the community may find some differences with the S.G.P.C. which cannot be expected to be as zealous for effecting reforms in the ritual as the reformers would like it to be. The Committee should therefore be a mere custodian of temples and should not be burdened with the additional work of deciding the questions of doctrine for the Panth. If it is invested with the sanctity of the Guru Panth, it becomes too powerful to care for any criticism of its work as manager of temples and their property. It should not be deprived of the

sense of responsibility to some authority outside its own constitution. This authority should be of an independent body, which should derive its power, not from the wealth of Gurdwaras, or influence with the Government, or any association with politics, but from the confidence placed in it by the community through its accredited representatives.

This body should not concern itself with the failings or differences of the so-called sects, except when these failings take the form of positive desecration of Guru Granth Sahib or anything else that is sacred. Let the Sikh principles be integrated through preaching, constant co-operation through liaison bodies like the All-Sects Conference, and mutual love and toleration. The central body, above mentioned, should publish a book of Sikh doctrines, well-authenticated with quotations from Sikh Scriptures and history. It should also prepare a standard history of the Sikhs from Guru Nanak down to the present day. These publications and the preaching based on them will level down all differences which justify the existence of sects, and then "there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation," as designed by the Gurus.

3. CONCERNING NEW NEEDS OF MISSIONARY WORK

The standardisation of the Sikh doctrine is necessary not only for unifying the different Sikh elements, but also for organising missionary work beyond the borders of the Punjab. In fact no serious attempt has been made, since the days of the Gurus, to spread their message outside the Punjab. All sporadic attempts made to establish connections with Bombay and Malabar have come to nothing. The cause may be that the bodies responsible for these campaigns were not very serious in undertaking the work. Or it may be that their engagements in other spheres, or rivalries with other local associations did not allow their best men to leave the Punjab. The failure in the case of Malabar has a special significance. About five hundred men and women from that region were converted to Sikhism, and were baptised at the Akal Takht with the ceremony conducted in English. They were sent away to their province with the good wishes of the whole Panth, but in a short time almost all of them went back to their old faith. The reason was that they could not be provided with any spiritual outfit, such as the daily prayers done in their own tongue. No Gurdwara was provided. But even if one had been built for them, what programme could they have followed in it? Which Scripture was to be installed therein? What music, what prayer?

Here is the crux of the matter. As long as Sikhism had to deal with people whose language was akin to Punjabi or Hindi, it had all possibilities of advance. But as soon as it came in contact with people who could not be approached in the original language of the Sikh Scripture, the attempt failed, because those responsible for the missionary work were not yet certain whether they could use translations in place of the original. This is

the problem. Can Malayalam, or for that matter any other language, serve the purpose of the Guru's Word? If Sikhism is to go to America or England, which language is to be used by the new converts, English or Punjabi? They will have to recite prayers individually, and approach God in their own tongue. How can their prayer be realistic if they offer it in the original Punjabi or Hindi?

But the difficulty is : Will the translation of the Guru's Word convey to them its whole content? Can the whole community, especially those who live in the Punjab, accept the translations with the same faith and reverence as they have been showing to the original? Will not different renderings create confusion in the Sikh world?

The answer to these pertinent questions depends on what our conception is of the 'inspiration' of the Word. Does the inspiration apply to the letter or to the meaning? If we believe in the verbal inspiration of the Guru's Word, then it is impossible to take translations as of equal efficacy with the original. But if we think that the idea lying behind the Word is sacred, then translations can be allowed. From this point of view, the divine idea which the Guru shares with God is immortal; and the clothing of the Idea, which the Guru has in common with humanity, is mortal, changeable and liable to grow strange and obsolete in a few lifetimes. 'For the immortal puts on mortality when great conceptions are clothed in the only garment ever possible—in terms whose import and associations are fixed by the form and pressure of an inexorably passing time.' Sikhism is for all time, and so is the Guru's utterance; but the language in which it is couched will become dead even to us Punjabis in a few generations. What shall we do then? We shall have to translate it. Then why should we not allow it to reach distant people in their own language?

The Guru himself believed in making translations. Guru Arjan, while preparing Guru Granth Sahib as the scripture of Sikhs, laid down an injunction for his followers that they were to translate the Holy Volume into Indian and foreign languages so that it might spread over the whole world as oil spreads over water.³²

References and Notes

1. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 360
2. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1324
3. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 2
4. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 17
5. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 700
6. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 684
7. 'Name' is a term, like *logos* in Greek, bearing various meanings. Sometimes it is used for God Himself, as in *Sukhmani*, xvi. 5 : "The Name sustains the animal life : the Name supports the parts and the whole of the universe." It is described as being 'immortal,' 'immaculate,' 'in-dweller of all creation,' and is to be sung, uttered, thought upon, served and worshipped. In most cases it means the revelation of God as found in the sacred Word.

8. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 4.
9. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 216.
10. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 15
See also *Jaitasari Ki Var VII* and *Guru Amar Das's Bhairo*
11. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1293
12. *Dasam Granth—Akal Ustati* 15.85 and 16.86
13. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 473
14. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 787
15. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 11
16. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 466
17. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1263
18. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 6
19. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 989
20. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 794
21. *Dasam Granth—Charitropakhyan*, 21.51
22. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 463
23. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 463
24. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 72
25. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 549
26. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 391
27. *Bhai Gurdas, Var i*, 42-43.

†In the Coronation Ode of Satta and Balwand the following verses occur :

"Guru Nanak proclaimed the accession of Lehna as a reward for service. He had the same light, the same method; the Master merely changed his body."

"The wise being, Guru Nanak, descended in the form of Amar Das." "Thou, Ram Das, art Nanak, thou art Lehna, thou art Amar Das." "The human race comes and goes, but thou, O Arjan, art ever new and whole."

Mohsin Fani, who wrote in the time of the Sixth Guru, says about the Sikhs in the *Dabistan* : "Their belief is that all the Gurus are identical with Nanak."

Guru Gobind Singh in his *Bachitra Natak* says about the Gurus : "All take them as different from one another; very few recognize them as one in spirit. But only those realize perfection who do recognize them as one."

See also the *Sad of Sundar*, the *Swayyas* at the end of *Guru Granth Sahib*, and *Bhai Gurdas's Vars i*, 45-48., iii. 12., xx. 1., xxiv. 5-25., xxvi 41 and 34.

The Gurus always signed themselves as *Nanak*.

28. "The Guru lives within his Sikhs, and is pleased with whatever they like."—*Gauri-ki-Var. IV*. "The Guru is Sikh and the Sikh who practises the Guru's word is at one with the Guru."—*Asa Chhant, I, 1*. See also *Bhai Gurdas, Vars iii*, 11, and ix. 16." The Guru is the Word, and the Word is Guru."—*Kanara, IV*.
29. *Asa-di-Var. vi. i*. "In this world the best practice is of the Word."—*Parbhati, I*. "My yoga is practised by singing Thy hymns."—*Asa, V*. *Sujan Rai of Batala* writing about Sikhs in 1697 says in his *Khulasat-ul-Twarikh* : "The only way of worship with them is that they read hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments." In the Golden Temple, Amritsar, up to this time, nothing but continuous singing of hymns day and night by relays of singers is allowed.
30. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 590.
31. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 646.
32. *Suraj Prakash, Ras III, Ansu 4, stanza 3-7*.

SIKHISM AND ITS UNIVERSAL RELEVANCE

PRITHIPAL SINGH KAPUR

I

Sikhism is a revelatory religion and its bedrock is the revelation that came to Guru Nanak at Sultanpur Lodhi (in modern Kapurthala district). The Janam Sakhi tradition has preserved for us a mystic as well as interesting account of Nanak's audience before *Parbrahm Parmeshvara*, the Almighty Lord and his anointment as Guru (the Enlightener) :

"As God willed, one morning he (Nanak) went as usual towards the nearby rivulet (Bein, which has been flowing on the northern side of Sultanpur Lodhi since centuries), along with a servant. There, he himself walked into the river for the morning ablutions leaving his garments with the servant. At that very moment on a command from the Almighty: Nanak was carried to the heavenly court where his arrival was announced by the attendants. The Almighty Lord showered His blessings on Nanak.....and offered him a cup full of nectar of *Nam* which he was asked to drink. Nanak drank the cup full of nectar and soon after that Almighty (Parmeshwara) announced grant of His grace to Nanak saying....."whosoever gets worthy of your favour shall be recipient of my benevolence. While I remain *Parbraham Parmeshwara* you would be (designated) the *Guru Parmeshwara*." At this; Nanak fell prostrate before the Almighty Lord who granted him a robe of honour (*siropa*) and sent him to this world of mortals."¹

To this day, it remains a mystery as to what happened to Nanak after he walked into the rivulet Bein for a bath; remained there for three days and three nights and subsequently re-appeared as a Guru (the enlightened one). Modern scholars like Macauliffe have tried to rationalise the *Janam sakhi* account by saying that after the bath in the Bein, Guru Nanak disappeared in a nearby forest "and was taken in a vision to God's presence."² In whatever manner the scholars might like to interpret this account found recorded in the Janam Sakhis, it has to be conceded that this was the most decisive moment and a turning point in the life of Guru Nanak which is significant for us to understand the doctrine he preached. It has also to be accepted that Nanak had a vivid mystic experience, remained in communion with the Supreme Being and came back as a

realized master-World teacher—Guru Nanak³. Soon after it became known that Guru Nanak had re-appeared; people gathered to know about the mystery of his disappearance in the stream. For a day Nanak would not utter a word. But next day he addressed the people with an unusual slogan "There is no Hindu no Musalman" (*Na ko Hindu, Na Musalman*). This cryptic statement had much more to convey than what it could mean to an ordinary being. Through these four words Guru Nanak proclaimed the oneness of all people and religions and wanted the people to look beyond these barriers and tread a common path towards perfection. Besides this, through these very words Guru Nanak pronounced that "both mankind and God are indivisible." That he attached no importance to garbs and labels is implicit in this statement. Guru Nanak repudiated the idea of distinctions between the Hindu and the Musalman. He went beyond these distinctions and fostered a religion of spirit which was thus set to disseminate the vision that he was endowed with; to the multitude that aimed at "acceptance of a genuine dialogue rather than formal conversion as the goal of transcending particularisms of contending cultures and feuding religions."⁴ Henceforth his utterances have a unique feature—categorical assertions that they carry within. Guru Nanak declares in unequivocal terms "without God I know not another" and "if some one grasps this thing; there is but one religion of truth."⁵ This is how he emphasises the all embracing humanitarian character of his gospel.

The essence of the gospel of Guru Nanak is known as *Mul Mantra* (credal statement) which is believed to be the first composition of Guru Nanak that defies the definition of either prose or poetry. God Himself invested Guru Nanak with *Mul Mantra* because it was at His behest that Guru Nanak poured out these words from his mouth :

"There is One God, He is the supreme Truth.

He the Creator; is without fear and enmity.

He is not born, nor does He die to be born again. By His grace shall thou worship Him."⁶

Each word of this composition is a conceptual term. In fact the *Mulmantra* can be described as condensation of the revelatory message of Guru Nanak. That is why it remains the main burden of the *Adi Granth*. (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*). All the attributes of God have been brought within its ambit and this very fact makes Guru Nanak's concept of God universally most acceptable.

From such a concept of the Unity of God springs the idea of Universal Brotherhood and equality of mankind. Guru Nanak reiterates "all before him are alike, none high or low." He challenges the claim of the so-called holy to be nearer God by denouncing asceticism, penances and performance of rituals for propitiation of God. On the other hand he favours "monism as means of understanding and a necessary step in the

ultimate spiritual evolution of man."* Guru Nanak also perceives the truth that all men are born equal and are endowed by the Creator with inherent and inalienable rights.⁷ It has to be clearly understood that Guru Nanak rejects all shades of inequality (of race, colour, sex, class, caste, clan or country) on a religious criterion. Having expounded these two postulates, Guru Nanak "struck his coin (of doctrines) in the world; instituted the holy panth" and set out on long journeys for the regeneration of the entire mankind dwelling the (then known) nine regions of the world.⁸

II

During these Odysseys called *Udasis* in the Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak made it a point to visit the centres of Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Islam where he invited the notables of the Holy orders for discourses on the matters divine. His message of *Satinam* (True Name) left a deep impact on the people and Nanak's fame spread all over.⁹ As a result, Guru Nanak attracted large number of followers where-ever he went. But he did not encourage formal conversation. He simply organised *sangats* (congregations) and appointed *mukhis* (chiefs) to disseminate the message he gave. In fact, Guru Nanak demanded of his adherents to place their body, mind and wealth before the Lord and partake the supreme elixir of His Name.¹⁰ The Sikh tradition illustrates this phenomenon by relating a detailed account of an episode connected with the death of Bhai Mardana (who professed Islam), a life-long associate of Guru Nanak "....And then the Guru said; 'Mardana, in which manner your dead body be disposed of; Brahmins throw away their dead bodies in running waters, Khatris cremate in fire; the Vaishyas let them remain in the open and the Shudras bury their dead. We will do as you wish or we might raise a memorial'....Mardana replied, 'You showed me path to deliverance from all bonds, then why do you again confine me by raising a memorial. Then Guru Nanak said : you have recognised the Almighty Lord, so you are a Brahmin. Your body will be consigned to the running water.....'"¹¹

By such precepts as narrated above, Guru Nanak made the people realise that there existed a reality higher than the empirical reality that we experience with our normal senses.¹² That was that made a large number of votaries of diverse cults (Devi, Nath, Pir (Muslim anchorities) look upon Guru Nanak as the Messiah of harmony who was ushering in an era of toleration, brotherhood and moral and spiritual upliftment. And yet he never wanted them to formally announce their conversion to the faith he had launched or denounce the religion they professed.

III

The personality of Guru Nanak has remained of continuing

*However this monism does not conform to the monism of Shankaracharya where loving devotion has no place.—Editor.

importance during the entire course of the chequered history of Sikhism. For the exposition of the revelation of Guru Nanak or the Sikh revelation as we may call it, we have to draw profusely from the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, compiled by the fifth Guru Arjan Dev. The sacred word or Bani in the Sikh terminology is a divine revelation as testified by Guru Nanak himself :

'As the Lord's word comes to me
So do I utter O' Lalo"¹³

and says the fifth Guru; Arjan Dev

"By myself I know not how to speak
I utter all that is the command of my Lord
Guru Nanak has shown mercy unto me
And has blessed me with the treasure of
God's devotional service."¹⁴

The compilation of Adi Granth [Sri Guru Granth Sahib] aimed at 'vertical expansion of spiritual consciousness commonly shared.'¹⁵ The compiler of the Adi Granth himself asserts in no unclear terms :

"I am neither a Hindu nor Muslim. My body and soul belong to Him who is called Allah (God) of Muslims and Lord (Rama) of Hindus."

.. ...

"Some call on "Rama, Rama" (The Lord) and some "Khuda."

Some serve Him as "*Gosain*" and some as "Allah."

He is the Cause of causes and is Bountiful.

Some talk of the Extender of mercy and some of the Merciful.

Some bathe at the Hindus pilgrim stations and

Some make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Some read the Vedas and some the Muslim religious books.

Some wear blue robes and some white.

One calls himself Muslim and other calls himself Hindu.

One desires the paradise of the Muslims and other the heaven of Hindus.

Says Nanak, he who realises God's Will, knows the secret of the Lord/Master."¹⁶

The above hymns of Guru Arjan Dev surely represent a new way of understanding the ultimate and stand in full consonance with Guru Nanak's utterance 'No Hindu No Musalman.' This also explains why the compositions of fifteen Hindu and Muslim saints were also included in the Guru Granth Sahib. These saints were drawn from a cross section of society, with spiritual attainment as the only criterion—not religion, caste, profession or even status in life—among them were Jaideva of Gita Govinda (a Brahmin), Sheikh Farid (a Sufi saint and spiritual teacher of Hazrat Nizam ud-Din Aulia), Sheikh Bhikhan, Namdeva (a calico printer of Maharashtra), Trilochan a Vaishya, Sadna a butcher, Ramananda (a Gaur Brahmin) Sain (a barber) Kabir (a Muslim weaver) and Ravidas (a

cobbler). Of course, every effort was made to ensure that all these hymns conformed to the doctrine of Guru Nanak. This speaks for the remarkable catholicity and universal character of the vision of the Sikh Gurus who collectively represent and stand identified with the Sikh Revelation :

The same light permeated him (Guru Angad) the same praxis—Only the Master (Nanak) his visible form had changed.¹⁷

The emergence of Harimandir—popularly called, the Golden Temple, as a central place of worship for the Sikhs represents another manifestation of the Sikh revelation in its entirety. Guru Arjan conceived the idea of raising this Temple of the Lord in the centre of the tank, got excavated by his father, Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru. Unlike, the traditional Hindu temples of India constructed at high plinth level with only one opening; the Harimandir was raised at a low level and with openings on all the four sides. It was not dedicated to any of the deities or gods but to the Lord Almighty himself. The Adi Granth, the repository of the revealed word was installed therein. No wonder, it continues to enshrine within itself a liberal tradition consecrated by Guru Nanak.

The compilation of the Adi Granth (Sri Guru Granth Sahib) and establishment of the Harimandir unfolds before us the real nature of Guru Nanak's revelation. The hymns of Guru Nanak became extremely popular with the people and such cryptic statements as "*Sabhinan jian ka iku data so mai visari na jai*" (There is but one bestower for all, May I never forget Him)¹⁸ touched the tender feelings of all those who cared for the matters divine. Others too gave their admiring ear towards these echos. In consequence the ranks of Nanak Panthis (as Dabistan-i-Mazahib a contemporary source-book calls the followers of Nanak) began to swell with such adherents as had earlier been the followers of the *Devi* and *Sultan Sakhi Sarwar* cults of Hinduism and Islam respectively.¹⁹ These new adherents were no ordinary people. They brought with them hordes of others to the fold of Sikhism. The Sikh tradition has it that one Tirath Manjh (of Hoshiarpur district), a follower of Sultan Sakhi Sarwar presented himself before Guru Arjan and begged of him permission to partake in the on-going voluntary service (since called *kar seva*) for bricking the pool of nectar (Amritsar) and construction of the Harimandir. The Guru entreated him not to forget that his milieu would oppose any such action on his part and even his relations might desert him. Manjh remained firm in his resolve and was ultimately blessed by the Guru.²⁰ The in-flow of many such pious souls into the Sikh-fold created a stir in the ranks of Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy. Consequently, the Sikhs wherever identifiable began to be boycotted and many of them found it difficult to marry.²¹ This was due to the Sikh—Guru's unrelenting adherence to the principle of equality of mankind cutting across all kinds of barriers. The bigots like Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi found a willing listener to their lamentations against Guru Arjan in emperor Jahangir who succeeded his

tolerant father, Akbar the Great in 1605. That Jahangir had accepted the pleadings of the bigots against the Sikh Guru is borne-out by his remarks in the *Tuzak* (autobiography) wherein he mentions that 'innocent Hindus and even foolish and ignorant Musalmans' flocked to him (Guru Arjan) and that he wanted to stop 'this shop of falsehood.' He got an opportunity before long; when the rebellious prince Khusrau called on Guru Arjan. That was enough to order the arrest, confiscation of property and execution of the Guru (by torture). Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi described this execution of the *Kafir* of Goidwal as "an act of grace for the followers of Islam."²² The first instalment of the high price for upholding Guru Nanak's religious and ethical injunctions had thus been paid.

The rising tide of Islamic fanaticism and wave of suppression and oppression could not deter the succeeding Sikh Gurus. They stuck to the ideals set forth by Guru Nanak and continued to welcome people from all sections of society and religions. The successor of Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind on his visit to Kashmir brought thousands of such Hindus to the fold of Sikhism who had earlier embraced Islam. He did not also hesitate to punish the ascetic yogis who had forcibly taken possession of a shrine dedicated to Guru Nanak near Pilibhit. At the same time, when he developed or founded new townships, he raised mosques and temples for the Muslims and the Hindus.²³ Guru Hargobind thus, lived upto the belief and assertion enshrined in the Sikh doctrine that approaches to the Divine domain could be different but Godhead was indivisible and the principle of equality of mankind remained un-assailable. In this context it will be relevant to quote here the third Guru, Amar Das' invocation to God for delivering humanity from misery :

"O Lord save the world (which is burning in misery) by showering thy benediction

Through whichever way it can be saved (uplifted); save it."²⁴

The sixth Guru prepared the followers of Nanak to defend the ideals of the new faith and made this clear to the Maharashtra saint Samrath Ramdas when the later met him in Garhwal hills. On seeing the grandeur of Guru Hargobind who was supporting costly attire and was accompanied by a retinue, Ramdas was surprised and spoke out, "I had heard that you occupied Guru Nanak's *gaddi*. Nanak was a *tyagi sadhu*— a saint who had renounced the world. You are wearing arms and maintaining troops and horses. You allow yourself to be addressed as *Sachia Padshah*, the True King. What sort of *sadhu* are you?"

Guru Hargobind replied, "internally a hermit and externally a prince. Arms mean protection to the poor and destruction to the tyrant. Baba Nanak had not renounced the world. He had only renounced *Maya*, i.e. illusion and ego."

"This appeals to my mind (*Yeh hamare man bhavati hai*); said Samrath Ramdas.²⁵

IV

Guru Har Rai and Har Krishna kept the style introduced by the sixth Guru. They continued to preach the gospel of Nanak among all sections of people; exhorting them to lead a spiritual life and to assimilate themselves in a social pattern that generates toleration for other's views and creates an urge within the soul to work for the welfare of entire mankind. The ninth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur also firmly believed as per the dictates of Guru Nanak's revelation that any attempt to force unity upon the people unmindful of their varying beliefs was violation of *dharma* and an act of tyranny. These preachings did irk the puritan emperor Aurangzeb who had vowed to convert the whole of India into a realm of Islam (Darul Islam).²⁶ He reacted by launching an all-out campaign of religious intolerance in 1669 that created an atmosphere of horror for the entire non-Muslim people. Guru Tegh Bahadur undertook tours as far as Assam to provide twin slogans of inculcating faith in the Almighty and imbibing courage as an answer to the grim situation :

"Without God's Name, thou shalt suffer pain."²⁷

"Do not terrorise any one.

Nor entertain fear of any."²⁸

Such was the courage and confidence displayed by the Guru that even the Rajput prince like Raja Ram Singh of Jaipur in the employ of Aurangzeb began to openly demonstrate their faith in the spiritual greatness of the Guru. On the other hand, Aurangzeb and his coterie of fanatic enthusiasts intensified their campaign of forcible conversion; defiling of temples and schools and exaction of *jazia*. As the pressure mounted, the Guru returned to his headquarters at Anandpur Sahib (Makhowal; a town he had himself founded in Shivalik foothills). Soon after, he received a representative delegation of Kashmiri Brahmins led by Pandit Kirpa Ram of Mattan who came to relate the innumerable tales of miseries that their co-religionists had to face because of severe repression let loose by the Mughal Governors. Guru Teg Bahadur heard them with rapt attention and consoled them with the cryptic reply, 'Baba Nanak himself will protect you.'²⁹ He also advised them to bear the tyranny with fortitude and forbearance. This was enough for the Mughal news-writers to report to the emperor that Tegh Bahadur had agreed to assume the leadership of all Non-Muslims to resist his policy of conversion. Consequently, the Guru was arrested and beheaded at Delhi. Before his execution, the Guru was asked per force to show a miracle (in order to demonstrate his nearness to God), embrace Islam or face death. The Guru preferred to stick to dictum of Guru Nanak :

"Apart from the (miracle of) True Name.

I work no wonder."³⁰

Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life for the ideals of justice, integrity

and righteousness and an inheritance of rich spiritual insight descending from Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh, (the tenth Guru and son of Guru Tegh Bahadur) has left a record to stand as testimony :

'He (Guru Tegh Bahadur) protected their

(Hindus') *tilak* (frontal mark) and

Janeu (sacred thread)

In this dark (*Kali*) age he performed a grand deed

He made the supreme sacrifice for men of faith (dharma)

He gave his head but uttered not a groan.³¹

Evidently it was the concept of universal Dharma pronounced by Guru Nanak that had been challenged and Guru Tegh Bahadur became its protector (Dharam-Di-Chadar). Significantly some hailed him as Hind-di-Chadar protector of India or Hindustan. Surely, "He gave his head but stuck to his resolve."³² To this day, the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur remains a superb act of self-sacrifice and of complete reliance on God's will. Guru Gobind Singh's, assertion that he was born "to uphold righteousness, to protect the worth and destroy the evil doers" fits into the scheme of events that follow.³³ He had first to contend with the co-religionists of those very people for whose protection his father had laid down his life. Raja Bhim Chand of Kehlur (Anandpur was a part of his principality) saw in the activities of the young Guru a danger to his own authority as also to their highly conservative socio-political system that had its sanction in the Hindu tradition. Therefore, it should not astonish us when we find these hill rajas (who knew full well about the Kashmiri Brahmin's petition before Guru Tegh Bahadur and his supreme sacrifice) sending a memorial to Aurangzeb seeking his protection as his tributaries and help to dispossess Guru Gobind Singh of Anandpur. Surely they did not like the concept of universal Dharma and an egalitarian society as enunciated by Guru Nanak and projected afresh by Guru Gobind Singh who chose to play the role of defender of the faith and the vision of Guru Nanak against this strange combination of the oppressor and the oppressed, *Momins* and the *Kafirs*, the idol breakers the idol worshippers and at a juncture when Aurangzeb had taken a vow to bring the entire Indian sub-continent into the realm of Islam.

Guru Gobind Singh's resolve was to destroy the evil doers, be they Hindu or Muslims. He welcomed men of all faiths to join him in this crusade. In *Akal Ustai* he emphatically and explicitly says :

"Recognize all mankind, whether Hindus or Muslims, as one

The same Lord is the Creator and Nourisher of all

Recognize no distinctions among them

The monastery and the mosque are the same

So are the Hindu worship and the Muslim prayer.

Men are all one !"

The principle of equality and unity of Godhead was thus carried to its logical end. A Muslim Pir, Syed Badr-ud-Din alias Budhu Shah joined the

Guru at Bhangani (modern Himachal Pardesh) to fight against a confederacy of hill rajas along with his sons and followers where he lost two of his sons. An ascetic Kirpal also did not lag behind. There are many other examples which can be recounted here but they need not detain us. The fact to be stressed is that the impact of Guru Nanak's revelation on all sections of people had become marked and creation of Khalsa in 1699 came to symbolize the birth of the forces of *Dharma* of Nanak's concept. The struggle that Guru Gobind Singh launched was in keeping with the teachings of Guru Nanak and the Khalsa continued it with determination till the oppressor or forces of the Evil stood vanquished.

During this century-old struggle, the Mughals as well as the Afghans repeatedly issued general orders for hounding out the Sikhs from the towns and villages. The Hindu Diwans like Lakhpat Rai and Jaspat Rai [who] became willing collaborators, led expeditions against the Sikhs and also successfully persuaded hill rajas not to allow the Sikhs to maintain hide-outs or even take refuge in their remote and uninhabited territories. Akil Das Niranjania (of Jandiala Guru) also volunteered to act as an intelligence agency for the successive *subedars* of Lahore and the Afghan invader Ahmad Shah, against the Sikhs. On the other hand the Sikh chiefs like Banda Bahadur proclaimed, "I do not oppress Muslims." Many Muslims joined his army and they were allowed to call *Azan* and offer *Nimaz*. On many an occasion the Sikhs fought to rescue the captured Hindu women from the tyrannous faujdars as also the invaders like Ahmad Shah Abdali. It will be of interest to narrate here that Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, a noted Sikh Sardar while encamping at Hissar received a complaint from a Brahmin that his two young daughters had been abducted by the faujdar of the pargana. Jassa Singh humbled the faujdar in a pitched battle and got the girls rescued. When the girls were brought to be restored to their father, he refused to own them because of the fear that the Hindu society would not accept them. Jassa Singh got annoyed at this. He besieged the Brahmins' village asked the girls to prepare food and compelled the whole body of villagers to take food at their hands. Besides he also arranged the marriages of these two girls.³⁴ A similar event is connected with the name of Sardar Hari Singh, a Bhangi Chief and his campaign against powerful Pathans of Kasur is too well known to be recounted here. When Lehna Singh, Bhangi captured Lahore, he personally went to the Badshahi mosque to offer greetings to the Muslims on the auspicious day of *Id* and the Muslim notables of the town in return petitioned to the Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali to negotiate with the Sikhs rather than try to humble them. They pleaded that only the Sikhs could ensure peace and prosperity in the Punjab. It is interesting to observe that though themselves victims of the worst religious persecution, the Sikh Sardars treated both the Muslims and Hindus generously and made no distinctions among the

people on grounds of caste or religion. Banda Bahadur the first among them to claim sovereignty, is stated to have once remarked 'the best thing for a king is to be just, as written in the holy Granth. If you call yourself Sikhs of the Great Gurus, do not practice sin, *adharma* and injustice."³⁵ Banda was perhaps making a reference to the emergence of a society with free, fair and just human order as envisioned by Guru Nanak. A glimpse of such a social order is presented by Ravidas Bhakta in the Guru Granth Sahib :

"The City Joyful is the name of that city-suffering and sorrow abide not there.

Neither is there the worry of paying taxes, nor does any one hold property;

Neither fear of punishment for error nor of decline.

This fine place of habitation have I found :

Brother ! there weal perpetually reigns.

Eternally fixed is the kingship therein :

No second or third are there; all are alike.

Ever fully populated, famous is that city.

Those abiding therein are prosperous, opulent

There, people disport themselves as they please.

All are inmates of that mansion; none bars any.

Saith Ravidas, the cobbler, freed from all bonds;

Whoever of that city is denizen, is our friend."³⁶

The above description also fits appropriately into the idea of Abode of Bliss as projected by Guru Tegh Bahadur.

The catholicity and liberality of the Sikh Sardars as also of Maharaja Ranjit Singh can be best explained in terms of the bearing that Guru Nanak's teachings had on their polity. Guru Nanak and his successors were essentially tolerant with universal connotations. Their primary concern remained religion and they unequivocally denounced pursuit of political power, if it ran counter to the path of *dharma* of their concept. That is why, "no Sikh worth the name did ever think of persecuting those who did not belong to his faith."³⁷ We do not come across any instance of forcible conversion in the entire course of Sikh history. Ranjit Singh still lives in the memories of the people for his humane and just behaviour towards his subjects irrespective of religion, caste and creed. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs to this day share him as a legendary hero. No wonder, the last prayers for the Maharaja were said by the members of all the three communities.³⁸

V

The fall of the kingdom of Ranjit Singh marks a steep bend in the otherwise glorious account of Sikh history. The believers in the invincibility of the Khalsa stood benumbed. Some like Bhai Maharaj Singh vowed to fight the British usurpers till the last drop of their blood was

shed. Others like Baba Ram Singh Namdhari thought of a search within and invoked the grace of the Almighty Lord while accepting the unwelcome events as the will of the Lord.³⁹ The annexation of the Punjab posed graver dangers than those which the Sikhs had hitherto been face to face with. The dispirited community stood exposed to the danger of dominance of Hindus and Muslims who out-numbered them. The advent of Christian missionaries and the aggressive proselytising activities of the Arya Samaj posed a threat to the very existence of the *Khalsa Panth* as a distinct identity.⁴⁰ This meant a change in the very nature and motive of the struggle hitherto known to the Sikhs. In the thick of this struggle the Sikhs learnt to organise themselves into parties on modern line, define their political aspirations and their attitudes towards the sister religious communities in the changed milieu. All this could have resulted in binding down the Sikhs to a narrow sphere. That the Sikhs managed to remain in the limelight on the Indian scene to leave their imprint on the freedom movement and to continue to claim reasonable adjustment in the emerging political settlement of the country, is an index of their intrepidity and determination. The new opportunities thrown up by scientific advancement have also been grabbed by them. Since the early twentieth century, they have established cultural contacts with the eastern and the western world. Whatever their number, they have insisted on telling their hosts that they are votaries of Guru Nanak who preached "Man is one. There is no such thing as Hindu, Musalman, Sikh or Christian, eastern or western. Man is man and man is one."⁴¹ That brings us to the conclusion that Guru Nanak's revelation sought to carve out a common road for the entire humanity to perfection. The Sikh is the product of Guru's universal love and by his very birth, he remains a citizen of the world.

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